THE SILVER CACHE OF THE ARAPAHOE

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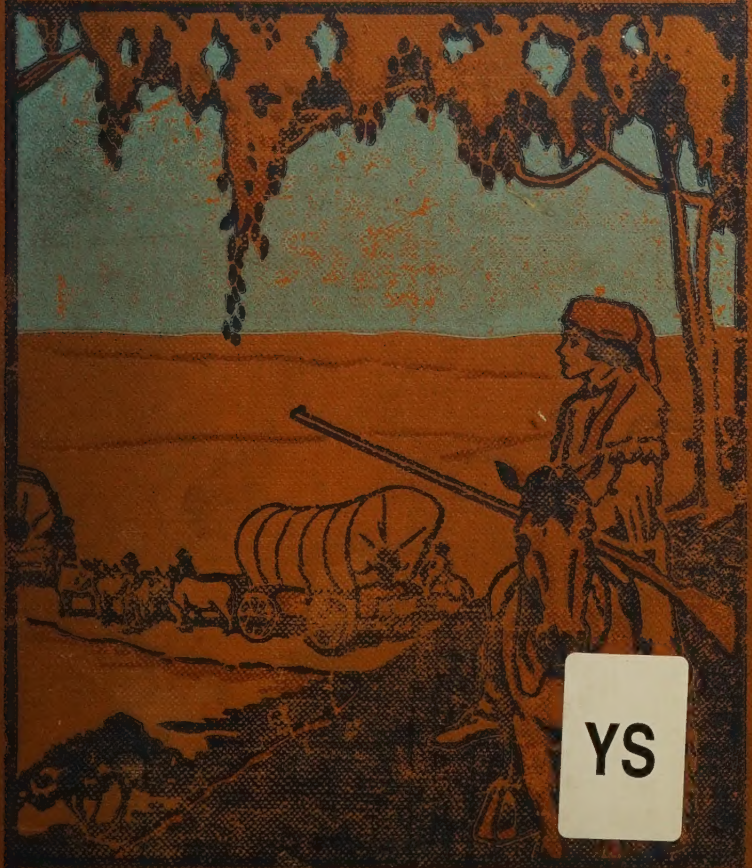

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D. LANGE

ST·ANTHONY·PARK
LOCAL·AUTHORS
·BOOK·SHELF·

THE SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE

"INDIAN" STORIES
WITH HISTORICAL BASES

By D. LANGE

12mo Cloth Illustrated

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX

THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE CHIPPEWA

LOST IN THE FUR COUNTRY

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS

THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

THE SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE

THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

THE THREAT OF SITTING BULL

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON

THEY WERE PULLED OFF THEIR HORSES, HELPLESS CAPTIVES.
Page 152.

THE SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE

BY

D. LANGE

AUTHOR OF "ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX," "THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE CHIPPEWA," "LOST IN THE FUR COUNTRY," "IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH," "THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS," AND "THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI"

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BOSTON

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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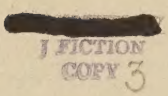

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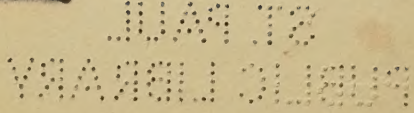
The Silver Cache of the Pawnee



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Dietrich Lange

FOREWORD

This is an adventure story of the Old Santa Fé Trail.

The Old Trail ran from Independence, near Kansas City, to Santa Fé, across the buffalo country of the Great Plains, a distance about the same as that from New York to Chicago.

At the time of the story, about 1835, the vast American prairies west of the Mississippi were the undisputed territory of the buffalo and the Plains Indians.

The powerful and warlike tribes of Pawnees and Comanches, of Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Kiowas, and Sioux, were all bold horsemen, hunters, and warriors.

Some of the tribes lived south and some north of the Arkansas River, where it flows through the present States of Kansas and Colorado.

A central region around Walnut Creek,

Pawnee Rock, and Pawnee Fork in the present State of Kansas was inhabited by none of the tribes, but was the battle-ground of them all.

It was through this dangerous Indian country that the Santa Fé traders took their long trains of heavy wagons drawn by oxen or mules. The proud Indians of those days had not yet felt the strength of the United States Army; and on the long trip of eighty or ninety days each way, the men of the caravan had to protect themselves against the hordes of savages, who were always ready to rob and scalp the traders.

The adventures of Silas Benson and his two sons and their staunch friend Burley among the Pawnees and Comanches are told in this story. Never was there a time and a country of more stirring romance and bolder adventure than the period and the region of the Old Santa Fé Trail.

D. Lange.

St. Paul, Minnesota,
June, 1918.

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THE SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE

CHAPTER I

THE INDIAN SIGN STORY

CROOKED HORN, the old Shawnee, who lived west of the frontier town of Independence on the Missouri River, was having a great visit in the store of Jack Langdon, outfitter for the Santa Fé traders.

The old store, often a very noisy place, was as silent as a church, for Langdon and Crooked Horn were conversing in the Indian sign language; and, although they had been "talking" for half an hour, not a word had been spoken.

"Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Kiowas," Crooked Horn was just saying with his hands.

"Camp Big Timber. Cold winter. Snow deep. Horses die."

"Comanches south. Warm country. Waiting buffalo go north."

"News of the Pawnees?" asked Langdon.

"Pawnees bad Indians," signaled Crooked Horn.

"Two white men on trail from Santa Fé. Wagon, four mules. Much silver, big sack. Kill one man. Take silver."

"When?"

"Four moons."

"Where?"

"Pawnee Fork."

At this point of the story Philip Benson, a lad eighteen years old, quietly slipped out and mounted his pony which had been tied to a post in front of the store.

Of the half-dozen men in the store no one had paid any special attention to the lad, who was well known at Independence.

It was now the middle of April, 1833, and ever since December of the previous year, the lad had been a weekly visitor in the lively,

not to say noisy, frontier town. There was the usual stir connected with the overland trade, but this spring much excitement had been caused by the outlook for a conflict with the Mormons, who had settled in large numbers at Independence.

Philip Benson had been over the long trail once and his father was at Santa Fé now. At least he had not returned from a trading trip on which he had started the previous spring. So it was but natural that Philip should take a lively interest in everything pertaining to the Santa Fé Trail and the Santa Fé trade. In fact the whole town had no other interest. Since in 1828 the Missouri River had practically swept away the old town of Franklin, Independence had become the starting point of the Santa Fé Trail, over which moved in long trains of heavy wagons drawn by mules or oxen the whole overland trade between the United States and Mexico.

Sometimes the lad would sit with a wistful air for hours in one of the numerous stores; at other times he would chat with the

workmen and the customers that came to the wheelwright shop of Sam Garland, who made some of the big wagons and turned out thousands of heavy ox-yokes every year. Then again he would ride to the outskirts of the town, where the stockmen herded and corralled their herds of oxen, mules, and horses that were bought and sold for use on the long trail.

It was generally known that Philip's father had gone with a supply of goods to Santa Fé in the spring of 1832 and that he had not yet returned.

Philip in all the places, where he visited, listened much, but said little. He was a welcome visitor everywhere on account of his willingness to lend a hand wherever help was needed. If a merchant needed some extra help, Philip was ready. Did a newcomer wish information about supplies and things most needed on the trail, young Benson modestly answered all his questions. If cattle or mules had strayed away, Philip was always ready to ride after them for ten or

twelve miles, and he seemed to know instinctively where the lost stock might be found.

When he was asked about his father, he generally replied that he had no recent news, which was true. In his heart, he was sorely troubled about his father's safety, but this fear he kept to himself and he tried not to let his mother know that he thought it strange that his father had not returned with the last caravan in December, and that neither Indians nor white men brought any news from him.

Every time he went to town he hoped to meet his father safely returned, or to pick up some news as to his whereabouts. He knew that his father had sold all his goods at a liberal profit, but this he kept to himself, for the town was so full of all kinds of criminals and doubtful characters, who would have liked nothing better than to waylay, rob, and murder a lone traveler outside of the settlements, where the arm of the law did not reach; and where the lone, wide prairie told no tales.

Now, at last, after four months of anxious waiting and listening, he had learned some news. But it was not the cheering news he had hoped and prayed for. That brief story told by Crooked Horn, if it referred to his father and his partner, was the worst news possible. He tried to persuade himself that it might refer to some other trader, perhaps to a Mexican, who had been on his way to St. Louis where these men bought large bills of goods every year. Perhaps Crooked Horn's story was not true; but the worried lad could not believe his own arguments. The old Indian's story rang only too true, and it confirmed only too well the fears which had slowly crept into the boy's own heart.

If Crooked Horn's story was true, the lad's father was either dead or in captivity, and the treasure of silver, which he had hoped to bring to his family as a Christmas present, had been squandered by the savage Pawnees or was cached somewhere on the prairie along the Arkansas River to be drawn upon whenever it seemed safe to the savage robbers.

At all events, a great calamity had fallen upon them all, father, mother, and their two boys. If his father had not been killed at the time of the robbery, he might have died of hardships or might have been murdered since. The lad knew full well that the savage Plains Indians, at this time still at the height of their power and entirely beyond the control of the United States Government, often killed their captives in fits of anger at trifling annoyances or in order to conceal their guilt of robbery or other outrages.

Even if his father were still alive, they would all be hopeless beggars with hardly the clothes on their backs to call their own. Their beautiful farm on the bluff of the Missouri, to which they were all so much attached, and where Philip and his young brother Ted hunted the wild honking geese in fall and spring, they would lose; for old Satterly, the money-lender at Independence, would surely not extend the mortgage. He was not in the business of helping poor settlers; he wanted to get for himself as much

land as possible, and to seize it on mortgage foreclosure was the cheapest way of getting it.

To recover the treasure of which his father had been robbed would be almost hopeless. Who were the robbers? Most likely a small band of unknown Pawnee outlaws, who roamed like wolves over the boundless plains north of the Arkansas. Where was the treasure? Who knew of its hiding-place? Probably only a few men. Perhaps only one man. Who was he? Where was he? He might be dead by this time. Indian outlaws led a hazardous life. If alive, how could he be found and made to tell, and forced to restore the stolen treasure? It all seemed utterly hopeless.

These were the thoughts that crowded one another in the lad's mind, as he rode homeward through the night.

He gave his pony the reins, and the animal fell into an easy lope. The rider did not see the bright starlit sky above him, he did not see the great valley below him. His young

soul was turned upon itself and he wrestled with the great trial and sorrow that had suddenly fallen upon him with a crushing weight.

Philip Benson lived with his mother and his younger brother Ted on a farm three miles below the spot where the road from the boat-landing passes a fine spring near the top of the bluff.

This point is really the beginning of the old Santa Fé Trail, as it led in those early days from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fé, eight hundred miles across the plains.

"Mother," Philip said, as with a flushed face he entered the log cabin, "I'm afraid I have bad news.

"Crooked Horn, the old Shawnee, just told Jack Langdon that four months ago some Pawnees robbed two white men on the trail at Pawnee Fork. The Indians took their wagon and four mules and a big sack of silver. One of the white men was killed, but Crooked Horn did not say what became of the other white man. I feel sure he did not know or he would have told."

"That is certainly bad news," assented his mother. "I always told Father he took too many big chances on the trail, but you men never listen to what a woman tells you," and the tears came to her eyes.

"Now, Mother, don't cry!" piped up little Ted. "The Indians can never get Father. He got away from them lots of times."

"Yes, boys," admitted Mrs. Benson, "he did. But what Phil told fits in too well with the letter Father sent us with one of the caravans from Santa Fé.

"He said he expected to come home about Christmas time with a nice bag of coin. He and his partner would take a good mule team, they would take enough sugar and coffee to give a treat to any small party of Indians, but he would avoid their camps. But you cannot tell where the Indians are roaming around, even if you know where their camps are, and you can never tell what some of them will do. There are bad Indians, just as there are bad white men. What can we do now?"

CHAPTER II

A SMALL BOY'S LOGIC

"IF we could only obtain reliable news about Father!" said Mrs. Benson, as she was putting the supper on the table for her boys. "Why couldn't Uncle Jethro join one of the trains and make inquiries along the trail? The blacksmith at Council Grove, or the men at Bent's Fort may have heard who the two men were. I think Father most likely stopped at Bent's Fort, unless he came by the Cimarron route."

"Why, Mother," Philip objected, "we might as well send Ted. Uncle Jethro doesn't know the first thing about the trail and about Indians. He can't even ride a horse. He is always sick with dyspepsia and would want to take a box of medicine along.

Uncle Jethro would never get farther than Council Grove, and that's only the beginning of the real Indian country. Beans and bacon and bull-steak would make him sick; he can't sleep on the ground, because he has the rheumatism in his knee, and he wouldn't want to stand guard at night. No, Uncle Jethro would be no good on the trail. He'd turn back with some tenderfoot at Council Grove, and we would only lose that much time."

"I'll go," Ted spoke up. "I don't have any 'spepsia in my stomach and I can sleep on the ground and stand guard at night. I'm not afraid in the dark. I looked at my catfish line after dark to-night. Honest Injun, I did Phil, because I forgot it in the afternoon. I can ride, too. I rode Uncle Jethro's balky mule to—"

"Oh, keep still, Ted," the older boy broke in, "let Mother talk. Babies can't go on the long trail. The Indians would scalp you and eat you up."

"You call me Baby, and I'll fight you!"

screamed Ted. "I'm no baby. I was eleven last month. The Indians can't scalp me. Don't you see?" and he drew his hand over his hair, "Don't you see? Uncle Jethro cut it short, so I wouldn't have to comb it."

Although Philip was very fond of his younger brother, he loved to tease him. Ted generally remained good-natured and had learned to defend himself, but he resented being called Baby.

"Now, boys, stop your quarreling and eat your supper," Mrs. Benson admonished. "This is no time for quarreling."

"I sha'n't let him call me a baby," Ted replied, "I learned all my letters since fall and I could learn Indians, too; and I can hit a mark at fifty—"

"Ted, you're a noodlehead," Philip broke in. "Now eat your supper or Mother will send you to bed. You'd be scared so bad at the sight of a real wild Indian that you'd run and holler for Mother louder than a b—"

"You call me Baby again and I'll,—I'll hit you with a broom!" shrieked Ted, now

really growing angry and looking around for some effective weapon; so Mrs. Benson had to threaten him with an early bedtime, while she scolded the older boy for intentionally making the little fellow angry.

Any one seeing the two brothers at supper might have thought that even the older boy did not realize how serious his father's case was, if the story of Crooked Horn referred to him. In reality the grave temperament of Philip was so much oppressed by the bad news that he fell to teasing his small brother as a relief from his own anxiety.

"Perhaps you might go with Uncle Jethro," suggested Mrs. Benson to Philip, after she had established peace between her two boys.

"Mother, please drop the thought of asking Uncle Jeth to act as an Indian scout. He'd be worse than a baby. Ted could do better than Uncle Jeth. I see only one way out of it," he continued thoughtfully, "I must join one of the caravans that will soon start on the trail to Santa Fé, and we must ask

Uncle Jeth to come and help you and Ted look after our stock and field."

"No, I go along," Ted asserted, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling.

"Ted, you keep still and let Mother talk," the older brother demanded again.

"I am afraid Uncle Jeth is not much of a farmer," Mrs. Benson suggested, ignoring Ted's remark.

"No, he isn't," the young irrepressible broke in, "he's a great soap-box orator. I heard Mr. Langdon say so. Uncle Jeth knows all about Texas and Mexico. He said Texas and Mexico would have a fight and then Uncle Sam's boys would go down and lick the tar out of both of them."

"Ted, if you don't keep still, I'll lock you up in the hen-house," Mrs. Benson threatened. "Don't you ever repeat any of Jack Langdon's nasty talk about Uncle Jethro. I know he calls Uncle a soap-box orator, but Uncle knows more history than Jack Langdon and all his store loafers together and I notice Jack is always mighty glad to have Uncle

come in and liven up his dirty old shack."

"I think, Mother, Uncle will stay with you, while I am away," Philip suggested. "I shall get all the planting and seeding done before I leave. No Santa Fé train will start before the first of May, because there will not be enough grass on the prairie before that time. All you have to do is to see that Uncle cultivates the corn and potatoes and cuts some hay, and doesn't go off to town to talk politics except on rainy days."

"I won't stay here with Uncle Jeth," Ted blurted out. "He'll want me to learn poems and learn to read the papers to him. He says boys shouldn't kill time by going fishing, they should read history and the Bible. I want to go with Philip and find Father and the sack of silver."

Ted became so excited in his arguments that he should go with Philip that his mother did send him to bed. But as he went upstairs crying, he asserted, "If you don't let me go, I'll run away and hide in one of the big wagons after dark and then,—then I'll,

—I'll ask the wagon boss to let me herd the cattle at night. If I don't come along Father will say, I'm a good-for-nothing brat."

Ted soon cried himself to sleep, while Philip and his mother discussed still further the plan of securing some reliable news of their father. Both came to the conclusion that some serious accident or misfortune must have befallen him, or he would have been home by this time, or at least, gotten word to his family in some way.

"It's no use, Mother," Philip explained, "to wait any longer and it's no use to expect the traders to bring us any news. They all go over the trail as fast as possible. They have all they can do to look after their own business and their own safety, and none of them can come back till fall. I can't see any other way, but that I have to go to find out what I can and do what I can."

Uncle Jethro was willing under the circumstances to look after his brother's farm and family.

"Guess it's up to me to look after your

mother and the place now," he admitted to Philip. "Your father was always strong for risking things. Always talked Indians and the West when we were boys in Vermont. Fine, daring fellow he always was. Got out of many a scrape with the Indians, but I fear it looks bad this time. That's the way it goes in life, Phil. 'A jug goes to the well till it breaks.'

"I'll tidy things up a bit around here, and then I'll move over. If it doesn't rain, I'll put in my corn and potatoes, and perhaps Sunday I'll come over; I'll bring my oxen and my pig. I guess I can run both places, if I hustle a bit."

Uncle Jeth was as good as his word. On the following Sunday he appeared on his ox-wagon with his pig in a crate behind him.

With Ted, Philip and his mother had a disagreeable time. He used all the arts which a spoiled child knows so well to muster, to convince his mother that he should go with his big brother. He even claimed that Phil would not be safe without him.

"You can't find out anything," he argued with Philip, "if you stick on the trail with the teams. You suppose the Comanches and Pawnees will come around and tell you all about Father and his silver. You bet they won't. Who is going to watch, when you're asleep?"

"You couldn't stay awake in a thunderstorm," Philip replied half converted to the idea that perhaps a young boy would not be entirely a hindrance, "and you don't eat beef. We'll have nothing but buffalo beef after we strike the Arkansas."

"Oh, shucks, Phil," cried Ted, "I'd watch mighty well, 'cause I'd be too scared to fall asleep. And you know I'd eat buffalo meat or anything. Didn't I learn to eat fish, when Father said I couldn't go fishing, if I didn't eat them?

"And I don't want to stay with Uncle Jeth," he continued after a short silence. "I don't like him. He talks nasty about Father. He says Grandpa spoiled Father by letting him go fishing and hunting in Ver-

mont. That's why Father didn't like to stay on the farm. I told Uncle that wasn't so. Father was a better farmer than he was. He didn't talk so much about Texas and Mexico and the black slaves, and we had a much better house and barn than he had.

"That's true, Phil," he declared. "Uncle got mad and was going to box my ears, but he couldn't catch me. He said he would tell Mother on me, but I guess he forgot. I bet he and Father had lots of fights, and I bet Father could lick him. I'm going to ask Father as soon as we find him."

After a few days Philip came to the conclusion that it would be best to take his small brother along. His mother would have a bad time between pedantic and crabbed Uncle Jethro and the impulsive small boy. Moreover, the small lad might well be of actual service in the Indian country, where two travelers were at least a little safer than one.

The pleading and the arguments of both the boys Mrs. Benson could not resist, and

although Uncle Jethro did not hesitate to say that the youngster should stay at home, Mrs. Benson reluctantly consented that Ted might go with his big brother on the Santa Fé Trail.

CHAPTER III

STRING OUT!

WHEN Ted was told that he could go on the Santa Fé Trail with his brother, he was the happiest boy on the Missouri River. I am not sure but that it would be true to say that he was the happiest boy in America.

"Phil," he said, "I can drive the corn-marker with the ponies; you can put in the seeds."

All forenoon, he kept the ponies going at a brisk pace. At noon he fed and watered them, and scarcely had men and horses finished their noon meal, when he was ready to go to work again.

"Come on, Phil," he urged, "I'm going to hitch up. We can finish that patch to-day if we hustle."

Philip smiled when his small brother assumed the airs of a man.

"I have a better plan now," he teased, "you are big enough to run the farm, we don't need Uncle Jeth."

"Oh, nix," remonstrated Ted earnestly, "you can't go back on your bargain. I go along on the trail. Didn't I tell you I wasn't a baby any more. Hop to it, Phil, get your seed corn, or I'll get far ahead of you."

Give a small boy a real motive and he will work like a man with an inspiration.

Ted kept it up day after day, till his mother and Uncle Jethro could hardly believe their own eyes. But mothers and old men rarely understand boys. They do not know the inspiration of a boy motive, they do not know that in almost every boy slumbers the spirit of the explorer and adventurer awaiting the magic call of a motive for exertion. Blessed is the boy whose mother is not over-civilized, and whose father has not forgotten his own boyhood!

Ted really worked like a man. The corn

was planted, the potatoes were put in. He helped to clean out the barn, he dug up and planted his mother's flower garden. He turned the grindstone for Philip, so that Uncle Jethro would have a sharp ax and scythe.

His mother began to feel that Ted was working too hard, but Ted said he wasn't, it was just lots of fun.

In the evening he did crawl into his bed soon after supper, but one call in the morning brought him to his feet. He insisted upon helping Philip with the chores before breakfast, so that even Uncle Jethro could not help remarking:

"By Jinks, Marian, I think that small lad will be a real farmer some day, if he doesn't turn wild in the Indian country. He reminds me of his father. Silas used to work his head off, when he got set on something. I remember one summer, how he built a duck-house and dug out a swimming-pond for them. Father had promised he could have all the ducks he could raise. The old man

never thought the youngster would take him up on it; he was about Ted's age then. But, by Jinks, he did. He sold thirty fat ducks in Brattleboro that fall. But he never took the money home; blew it all on a fiddle and a gun, which showed that he wasn't a real born farmer."

Within a week the place was in shape to be turned over to Uncle Jethro, who made it plain on many occasions that he was a real farmer, although thus far he had done nothing but putter around the yard and talk Texas, Mexico, Mormons, and slavery.

"By Jinks, Marian," he would say, "Texas is going to come to us, to the United States; they will never go back to the Greasers. Then it won't be long before the slaveholders have the majority in Congress and then there'll be trouble.

"Well, Marian, the lads have put the place in fair shape, that's true, but if I were you, I wouldn't let them go after Silas. Silas was always pretty good at getting out of a scrape. If he's alive I guess he'll come home some

of these days. By Jinks, Marian, I wouldn't let the lads go after him."

But Mrs. Benson would not listen to this well-meant advice.

"No, Uncle," she replied, "I could not rest and stay quietly at home. And the boys feel just as I do. We must get some news, even if it should be the worst news."

It was now the last week in April and the boys were ready to leave.

"I want to take my white pony," Ted had said when they talked over what animals to take.

"No, you can't!" Philip told him flatly. "An Indian can see a white pony ten miles off. You'll take the bay or the black, or you'll foot it. A white horse is no good in the Indian country."

Ted was convinced. "All right," he replied, "I take the black and we'll leave the white for Uncle Jeth."

"But I tell you what you ought to do, Phil," he continued. "You ought to get Uncle Jeth to cut your hair real short like

mine, so an Indian can't take hold of it."

Everybody laughed at Ted's advice, but Uncle Jeth took his side.

"By Jinks, Phil," he remarked, "I'll cut it off for you. You can't be too careful with these wild critters."

"Oh, Uncle! don't talk foolish," Phil laughed. "I don't intend to let any Indian get that close to me."

It was a fine spring morning when the lads started on their long and dangerous quest. From the young foliage on the Missouri bluffs rang the, "Cheer, cheer, cheer, cheer," of the redbird or cardinal, but the only cheerful human being in the party was Ted, too young to judge the danger and difficulty of their enterprise. Mrs. Benson's face only cheered up with a proud smile, when Ted's boyish voice piped out, "All's set! We're off for Santa Fé!"

Behind each boy a large pack was tied to the saddle. It contained their blankets and the usual provisions for the trail: bacon, flour, beans, and home-made hominy. To

these supplies they would add at Independence sugar and coffee. Each lad carried, of course, rifle, pistol, and hunting-knife.

"We should have seen the lads off to town," said Uncle Jethro, breaking the silence, after the boys had waved their last farewell and had disappeared behind a clump of trees.

"Oh, no, no," answered Mrs. Benson with tears in her eyes, "I couldn't make a scene for the whole town. If I had gone to town with them, I fear I should have lost courage and asked them to return home with me. It's over now, but I shall count the days till the boys and their father are home again.

When Ted and Philip reached the spot where the road comes up from the old steamboat landing, they dismounted for a drink out of the cool spring under a young elm-tree.

The clear, cool spring runs out of the gray rocks to this day, and the sapling elm has grown into a fine old tree, on whose spreading branches the oriole hangs his nest.

When the lads had quenched their thirst,

Ted poured a hatful of the cold water over his head and face.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Philip. "You can't be hot?"

"No, I'm not hot," admitted Ted. "But I feel like bawling and riding back home."

Just then a steamer whistled about half a mile below at the landing.

"Get your horse," suggested Philip. "Let us ride down and take a look at the crowd."

It was a steamer of the American Fur Company from St. Louis, heavily loaded with all kinds of goods for the Indian trade farther up the river.

A number of families got off with a motley supply of household goods destined for the frontier of Kansas and Missouri. Bales and boxes were being unloaded to be hauled overland nine hundred miles to Santa Fé, and a drove of mules and oxen were pulled and pushed over a gangplank with many strong expletives of their owners and drivers.

"What is in all these big boxes marked Paint?" asked Ted as the boys walked around

on board. "I thought the Indians made their own paint out of mud and roots?"

"Those boxes," Philip replied, "I guess aren't filled with paint. I guess each has a barrel inside, which some rascally trader is trying to sneak past the army officers at Fort Leavenworth. I hope the army officers will dump the stuff into the river."

At Independence Philip had no trouble in joining one of the caravans, which was to start within a few days. The lads being willing to do any kind of work on the trail and furnish their own horses and supplies, the boss of the train, or wagon-master, as he was called, was glad to add two armed recruits to his force. The Indians were known to be restless and troublesome, and there were never too many men to serve at night as guards for the wagons and as herders for the oxen and mules. It was a common trick of the Indians to stampede the oxen and mules over the endless wild prairie, where it was nearly always impossible for the owners to recover them.

On a fine morning early in May the train was ready. At this time the Santa Fé trade was still carried on by men of comparatively limited means. Six of such small traders had combined for the train which Philip and Ted had joined.

A captain or wagon-master had been chosen to have control over the whole train, which consisted of twenty-five big freight wagons, often called prairie schooners, and one mess-wagon.

At the appointed hour the call rang out, "Catch up, catch up!" which meant get ready to move. The drivers yoked up their oxen or harnessed their mules. There was much noise and confusion. Each wagon was drawn by four or five spans of mules, or six yokes of oxen. The animals did not yet know their places, so there was much confusion and much loud mule-talk and ox-talk on the part of the drivers, each of whom wanted to be the first to cry out, "All's set!"

Some of the animals the drivers knew had never been broken, but they also knew that

a green ox or mule, once he was in the yoke or harness, soon had to pull as the other animals did. His case was that of a raw recruit put in a disciplined regiment; he cannot help becoming a soldier in short order.

Half an hour might have passed, when Jim Burley, an old driver and packer called out, "All's set!" Burley had only a few minutes the start of the next man, and it was not long before the last driver had kicked and pulled and pushed and cussed the last obstreperous mule into position and harness.

The wagon-master gave a few last directions, looked at the outfit of a new driver and called, "String out! String out!" and with clanking of chains, cracking of whips and lusty yells in both English and Spanish the train strung out on the trail across the great prairie.

"Gosh, it's great!" was all Ted could say. "I'm going to be a Santa Fé trader like Father. You won't catch me living in a homestead shack and getting crabby like Uncle Jeth."

Philip and Ted had placed their bacon, beans, and other eatables on the general mess-wagon, while their blankets and extra clothing were on the schooner of Jim Burley.

The two lads were the only members of the train on horseback and the men dubbed them at once, "The pony dragoons." The wagon-master; Jim Burley, his assistant; one extra man and the night-herder were mounted on mules. The drivers walked alongside their animals. Only one man was allowed to ride in one of the wagons, that was the night-herder. As he had to watch the cattle every night, he slept in a wagon during the day-time.

The train had no general mess cook. The thirty-two men including Ted and Philip divided themselves into four messes, and the man who was most handy with pans and kettles acted as cook. He was relieved of all guard duties and night-herding, and the other men had to furnish him with wood and water.

From Independence to Council Grove, one hundred and fifty miles west, the trail was

well marked even at this early time and the camping-places were well known. They were all at some stream or spring, where wood and water could be had and where the grass was good for cattle and mules.

The first day the train made only about ten miles. There was as yet no danger from hostile Indians and only the night-herder and his helper were on duty during the night to keep the stock from straying away or from stampeding; for both mules and cattle as well as horses will at times take fright at almost anything. At such moments their wild instincts gain complete control of them and they run madly from some imaginary danger, as their ancestors long ago ran from the wild beasts and savage men that hunted them.

"Everybody lie down to-night," ordered Captain Harley, the wagon-master, who was generally referred to as Doc Harley because he knew as much about sick mules and oxen as the regular horse-doctor at Independence. "When we strike the wild country we'll set guards."

Philip and Ted, who were still under the spell of the novelty of the whole scene, asked old Shawnee Pete, the night-herder, if they might help him herd the stock during the night, but old Pete turned them off gruffly.

"Naw," he said; "don't want any green kids around to-night. You youngsters will get your hides full enough of night-herding after we strike Indian country. Roll up in your blankets and shut yer eyes!"

"Gosh," remarked Ted, "he's a worse crab than Uncle Jeth."

"Oh, he's not so bad, after you know him," replied Philip. "I guess the old man played cards all last night, and is not in good humor now. Let's go and see what Jim Burley is doing."

Jim was just making his bed outside the wagon corral. It was a very simple matter. He had just folded one blanket to be used as a pillow and was rolling himself up in his buffalo robe.

"Put your saddles on the ground, boys," he suggested, "and roll up in your blankets.

Old Doc will rouse the camp before daylight."

The boys did as Jim had suggested, using their saddles for pillows; after they had staked their horses close by.

"Why don't you let the beasts run with the herd?" asked Jim.

"No," protested Philip, "we are going to keep the ponies handy. It wouldn't be any fun to hoof it back to town after them!"

Thus ended Ted's and Philip's first day with the Santa Fé train.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE TRAIL

TED could not go to sleep for some time. The novel scenes and the excitement of the day made him wakeful. In the distance he could hear the sound of the bell attached to one of the mules for the purpose of keeping the herd together. From time to time one of the ponies would snort and Ted imagined that he faintly heard an Indian creep over the prairie, and he could not help thinking of Philip's carelessness in going on the trail without having his hair clipped. He tried to dismiss these thoughts, for he knew that the train was still more than a hundred miles from the region of any hostile Indians. The night was growing quite chilly, and from a distance came the long weird howl of coyotes, which always followed the trains to pick up any scraps of food left on the camp sites.

But the little fellow was getting drowsy now, and to avoid the chill of the night air on his face and bare head, he crept entirely under the buffalo robe and snuggled close to his big brother, who seemed to be sound asleep.

At dawn, the songs of the meadow-larks and the deep booming of prairie-chickens announced the new day. Half-awake Ted put his head out to find where he was, but the raw morning air caused him to crawl back under cover.

Soon the call: "Roll out, roll out!" rang through the camp.

Both lads felt stiff from sleeping on the hard ground to which they were not accustomed, but they ran down to the creek, splashed some cold water over their faces, and were ready for their first breakfast on the trail.

The cooks had their fires going by this time, and hot coffee and fragrant bacon soon put everybody in good cheer.

However, when Shawnee Pete came in on

his mule and reported that several mules and six of the oxen were lost and not to be seen anywhere, much of the good cheer vanished.

This was news not at all welcome, because it meant that the whole train would be delayed till the lost stock was found and brought in.

"Pete, you old sleepy-head," Captain Harley scolded the herder, "there you're again with your tale of lost stock. You curled up again in your blanket and let the stock herd itself. Consarn your old hide, Pete, if the Indians don't scalp you, I'll have to fire you yet!"

Old Pete was very crestfallen and said he would go right after the stock without first eating any breakfast.

"No, you won't." Captain Harley told him. "Sit down and get some hot coffee into yourself, so you wake up; you're still half asleep. It would take you and your lazy old mule all day to bring in that stock. Let the boys go after the beasts on their ponies."

"Yes, Captain, we'll go," Ted offered,

quickly finishing the last bites of his breakfast.

"Father taught me a mighty good rule when I went over the trail with him," Philip remarked as the boys rode away toward the herd.

" 'Look after your stock and horses,' he often told me. 'It's easy to lose them, but often hard to find them again. Keep your gun loaded and keep it handy. When you want it, you want it badly, and you want it quick. Most of the scrapes and difficulties men get into on the trail are due to plain, rank carelessness!' "

"Where do you suppose those lost animals strayed?" Ted asked. "I don't see a sign of hoof or horn anywhere."

"We will ride along on this ridge toward town and look about on either side."

The boys had traveled about two miles, when Philip spied some dark specks on the prairie eastward.

"Look, Ted!" he pointed out, "there go our strays. Stop a minute, let's see whether

"Look, Ted, there go our strays!"—*Page 50.*

they are moving. Yes, they are; they are beating it straight for home."

After half an hour's brisk riding the boys had overtaken the animals and turned them back on the trail.

"If old Pete was any good as a herder," remarked Philip, "he would have been especially careful so near home. After the animals get used to each other and are far from their home region, they are not so likely to leave the herd."

There was joy in camp when the lads after an absence of three hours, returned with every head of the strayed animals.

"Good work!" was Captain Harley's greeting to the boys. "I'm all-fired glad you're with us.

"Now, Pete, you sleepy old Indian," he said, turning to the disgraced herder, "you crawl into your blankets, and if any man sees your face before we get to camp, he'll cut your big ears off with the blacksnake. A fine mess you would get us into in the Indian country!"

The strayed animals were quickly yoked and harnessed and again the caravan strung out on the trail.

Captain Harley urged his men to travel according to the rules of the trail observed by all cautious traders.

"Don't string out too far," he told them. "Not more than a mile at the most. If you string out two, three miles, the Indians can eat you up one by one.

"To-night we form a regular corral. Teams one to thirteen form a half-circle to the left, numbers fourteen to twenty-six form a half-circle to the right. We might as well get used to it, before we reach the dangerous country around Pawnee Rock."

When the train reached the creek where camp was to be made, Captain Harley ordered the wagons to cross and make camp on the farther side.

"Why don't we stay on this side?" asked Ted. "There's more wood on this side."

"We cross over now for two reasons," Philip explained. "Crossing a creek always

means a hard pull and cattle don't pull well in a cold yoke, as the drivers call it; so it is always easier to get across in the evening than in the morning.

"Another reason is the treacherous character of these prairie creeks. You strike one in the afternoon and you find it a sleepy little stream, crawling along among cottonwoods and box-elders with scarcely enough water for the catfish and suckers to hide in. You wake up in the morning and find a big muddy river roaring past your camp. There was a thunderstorm or a cloud-burst somewhere up-stream and you have to sit on the bank and wait till the freshet runs by, which may delay you a whole day or more."

The wagons were formed into a circular corral or fort as Captain Harley had ordered, with two openings, where the right and left wings met.

If an alarm was sounded the cattle and mules could be driven inside of this corral, where they could neither be stolen nor

stampeded; while from behind the wagons a few well-armed and resolute men could beat off a horde of savage Indians, who in those days were armed only with bows, arrows, and spears, and poor guns. Even if they had a few good guns, they had not yet learned how to use them.

"Now, Pete," the Captain told the night-herder after supper, "you had a long sleep to-day. If you lose any more stock after this, you foot it back home to hoe potatoes."

"I'll keep them rounded up, Captain," Pete promised, as he mounted his mule and rode off toward the herd of some three hundred and thirty head that were scattered over the hills west of the creek, where the young growth was coming strong and green through the old grass of last year.

"You needn't stand guard, boys," the Captain told the men, "till we have passed Council Grove. I guess the Reds won't trouble us this side of the Grove. But you must take turns helping Pete watch the stock. We have a few extra head, but the

critters are too valuable; and I wager we'll need them all, so we just can't afford to lose any."

Next morning the right wing of the corral pulled out first. On account of the dust it was more pleasant traveling in the first section, and for that reason the sections changed places daily, but the teams in each section always traveled and encamped in the same order. In this way each ox and mule soon knew and found his place in the line, and the train was spared much trouble and profanity on the part of the drivers.

When the train arrived at Council Grove it was the middle of May. The trees had leafed out, the woods were alive with the birds of summer, and rich young grass was abundant everywhere.

The train halted a day at this place. It was the last place, where good timber was found, and a supply was cut to be in readiness for extra poles, fallows, and yokes that might be needed.

Old Bill Watson who ran a blacksmith shop

at this place had a busy and profitable day shoeing mules and repairing wagons.

From old Watson the lads learned the first bit of interesting news.

It verified the story of Crooked Horn. Two men had been robbed by some Pawnees. One of the men had been killed, the other had escaped. But this man was captured by a party of Comanches, who fell upon the Pawnees while they were committing the murder and robbery.

The attack had happened at Pawnee Fork a few days before Christmas. There was not more than half a dozen Pawnees in the war party. The two white men were each about forty years old, and were traveling in a light wagon drawn by four large mules.

This was all the blacksmith knew. Several Pawnees had been in his shop and store since that time. They claimed not to know the young men that had committed the outrage. No Indians had shown any money in his place, nor had they worn or shown any ornaments hammered out of silver or gold coins.

Philip came away from the honest old blacksmith in very serious thoughts.

"It was Father and his partner, all right," he assured Ted. "The story tallies too well with Father's plans and ways. We can't do anything else now but go on with the train and keep our eyes and ears open. We may fall in with some friendly Indians who can give us some more definite news."

CHAPTER V

OXEN AND MULES

THE train had now been on the trail about ten days, and the boys had been away from home about two weeks, although the time seemed much longer to them.

The heavily laden wagons, carrying from two to three tons each, could not average more than ten or fifteen miles a day. The caravan did not, however, attempt to make a certain distance daily, but the length of its day's journey depended on the location of suitable camping-grounds.

It was impossible to carry grain or hay for the animals of which Captain Harley's train had about three hundred and thirty head. All these animals had to depend on grass, and for this reason the camps could be made

only at places where grass and water were plentiful.

It took the lads, especially Ted, some time to become used to the routine of the train. At daylight, the herder and his helper brought in the cattle, which were at once yoked to the heavy wagons. Then the train started and traveled until about ten or eleven o'clock, or until a good camping-place was found. Here the men had their breakfast.

The wagons were drawn up in a corral, while the animals, in charge of the herder and his assistant, were turned out to water and to graze and rest till about three o'clock.

In the afternoon the train kept going till the next good camping-ground was reached, which was sometimes early and sometimes late in the evening. In this way the cool hours of morning and evening were used for traveling.

When supper was ready, the men did not have to be urged to eat, for daily journeys in the keen air of the prairie created an appetite

which people who spend their lives in houses and offices do not know. When the meadow-larks ceased singing most of the men were asleep in their blankets and under their buffalo robes, for the prairie air made them sound sleepers as well as hearty eaters, and the nights were always too short.

By the time the stars had lit their twinkling lights above the endless prairie, a deep silence had fallen upon the camp, made only more impressive by the heavy snoring of some tired sleepers, the muffled tread of the guard, the faint sound of a cowbell from the herd; and the wailing, melancholy howls of the coyotes.

Before the train left Council Grove, Captain Harley had urged his men to be on their guard against hostile Indians.

"Dont string out too far," he told them. "Have your guns loaded and keep them on the outside of the wagons, and don't stroll far away from camp, if you want to keep your scalps on."

Jim Burley who had grown fond of Philip

and Ted, also warned the boys of the dangers of the country they were now entering.

"You have to cut out, boys," he cautioned, "riding ahead of the train, or straggling behind, or chasing after jack-rabbits.

"Don't think there are no Indians about because you don't see any. An Indian can hide in anything that makes cover for a prairie-chicken. Old Doc swears he once saw an Indian come out of a badger-hole. So look out for your hair, boys, till we get back to Council Grove."

"They can't get mine," Ted protested. "It's too short."

"Better not let them try it, kid," Jim laughed. "Some murderous buck would have it yanked off before he'd noticed how short it is. And I tell you, kid, your light bristles are growing pretty fast. You fellows had better stick to the train, I tell you."

When the train reached the camp known as Last Spring, about forty miles west of Council Grove, they saw the first buffalo, and three young men brought in a fat young bull for

supper. A small herd of buffaloes was seen at a distance of about two miles from camp, but Captain Harley would not allow the men to go after them.

"You do your hunting close to camp," he told them. "Where the buffaloes are the Redskins are likely to prowl about, and between here and the mountains we can easily get plenty of buffaloes close to the trail."

After two more days of travel, the caravan reached the Little Arkansas and here the lads saw the wisdom of Captain Harley in having chosen as many oxen as he could get for draft animals. The stream had been swollen by a freshet and a great deal of mud and quicksand had been deposited at the crossing.

"Cut a lot of brush and dump it in here," Captain Harley told the men. "I guess we can make it then."

The ox-teams crossed the treacherous ford without much difficulty. The big strong animals sniffed and smelled the ground as if to pick out the best footing. If any of them

sank through the brush, they did not become excited or lie down, but just walked ahead and pulled, and as long as chains and yokes did not break, the heavy wagons had to come after them.

But when the first mule team tried to cross there was trouble. The animals were so excited that the driver lost control over them. Some of the animals missed the ford, and became mired, and, although they made frantic efforts, they were unable to pull their feet out of the sticky mud, and half a dozen of them came down in a heap. The heavy wagon slid down almost on top of them and only came to a stop the very moment when everybody thought it was going to topple over into the creek.

The driver looked at the confusion in helpless despair.

"Look at the mess!" exclaimed Captain Harley. "I never believed in these consarned mules. They are no good except on a dry road. Give me a sensible ox any time.

"Bill," he then turned to the driver, "just unhitch that mess.

"Here, Jack and Shorty," he called to two other drivers. "Bring your cattle and pull these long-eared idiots out!"

"Gosh," exclaimed Ted breathless with excitement, as the steady oxen literally snaked the mass of helpless mules out of the mud, "gosh, Phil! I don't want to be a Santa Fé trader, I'm going to be a wagon-boss like Doc Harley. Look, Phil! Didn't you think the mules were all dead. They aren't, they are getting up."

Much to the surprise of the boys, not one of the mules was seriously hurt, and as soon as they were relieved of their harnesses, they rolled themselves on the ground and went off to graze as if nothing unusual had happened to them.

The captain now turned his attention to the mired wagon.

"Here, men," he called to half a dozen drivers, "get some poles and hold that wagon up, while we are getting it started.

"Bill and Shorty, hitch your cattle to it. I'm done with mules at this crossing."

It took Bill and Shorty but a few minutes to obey the order. The oxen also seemed to know what was expected of them. Without excitement some yokes took their places in the creek, while the others stood quietly on the bank until all was ready and the drivers called: "Get up, boys, get up!" Then quietly and slowly all leaned their shoulders against the yokes, and the big wagon righted itself and came up the bank as if it had been a child's toy cart.

"Well done, boys!" the wagon-boss called out, and Philip and Ted were not sure whether he referred to the drivers or the oxen.

"Now get the other mule-wagons, too," he told Bill and Shorty. "There'll be no more mules in any train of mine."

The caravan was now within a few days' journey of the Great Bend of the Arkansas. This river like the Missouri and the Platte is one of the great prairie streams of North

America. The water of all three of these rivers makes the long journey from the high ranges and peaks of the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi. All three cross the Great Plains, which less than fifty years ago furnished the wild pasture for vast herds of buffaloes and where the hunting-grounds of the most powerful, warlike Indian tribes.

The greatest and most dangerous battle-grounds of the Indian country lay now right ahead of the train. In the region between and around the present towns of Great Bend and Larned, both on the Arkansas River in the state of Kansas, no Indians ever dared to make a permanent camp. The country was the battle-ground of many of the Plains Tribes; Pawnees, Kiowas, Comanches, Arapahoes, Cheyennes. In the days of the Santa Fé Trail every wagon-master and every stage-driver was thankful when he had safely passed the camping-places at Walnut Creek, Pawnee Rock, Ash Creek, and Pawnee Fork.

The men in Captain Harley's train saw their first Plains Indian one afternoon late

in May, when they were within a few miles of Walnut Creek. He was over a mile away and seemed to be riding toward a large herd of buffaloes that could be seen grazing farther west.

Some of the new men claimed the figure seen was not an Indian, but an elk with a big pair of antlers.

"One lone Indian," claimed Fatty Jarvis, the leanest and in his own opinion the wisest man in the crowd, "wouldn't be hunting buffaloes. There would be a bunch of them."

"Fatty, if you want to sell your hair cheap, go and look for that elk," Burley challenged Jarvis. "It was an Indian, I tell you. And he wasn't alone either I'll wager; there's a hundred of them behind the ridge, may be a thousand.

"Fatty, before we get over this fight stretch to the Cimarron Crossing, you'll learn a whole lot more about Indians."

That night Captain Hurley ordered three men to herd the stock and placed two men on guard duty in the camp.

CHAPTER VI

ALARM AND STAMPEDE

IT was Philip's and Jim Burley's turn to stand guard from ten to twelve at the Walnut Creek Camp.

"I'm going to stand guard with you and Jim," Ted declared when after supper the two brothers went to the creek to see if there was a good catfish hole near the crossing.

"You had better not," Philip tried to persuade him. "Two guards are enough, and there are plenty of men to take turns at it. You had better roll in."

"No, I am going to stand guard with you. You and Jim said I could in the Indian Country. I'm not going to tell Mother that I played the baby and never did anything on the whole trip."

"Aren't you helping me to drive the loose stock and round up the stray animals in the morning?" Philip asked.

"Oh, yes, I do, but that's nothing. Anybody could do it; there's no danger in it."

When ten o'clock came Ted took his gun and began to walk slowly back and forth on his beat, which was just outside the corral facing the valley of the Arkansas, where the stock was grazing. A few rods off the two ponies, Blackie and Kio were staked, far enough away so that they could not reach the wagons, and far enough apart so that they could not tangle each other.

Ted had never felt quite so big and important in all his life. Catching his first fish and bringing home his first jack-rabbit was nothing compared with doing real sentinel duty, standing guard with a real loaded gun against real Indians. He felt sure that Jim was right about the Indian seen in the afternoon and that there were hundreds of them in hiding not far from camp.

The night was warm, but spooky, with the crescent of the moon hiding behind banks of clouds in the southwest. From time to time he met Philip or Jim, and he felt sure that

he could by ear tell their walk from the footsteps of an Indian. As he continued to peer and listen into the darkness, his eyes and ears seemed to grow keener as the darkness increased. Puffs of wind sprang up. He heard the sound first in the trees on the creek and was surprised that a little wind could make such a big noise. The wind and the increasing cloudiness would make it harder to hear or see approaching Indians.

When he met Philip the next time, he asked what time it was. "About half-past ten," answered Philip, and strolled off.

"Gosh," said Ted. "I thought it was almost twelve o'clock." Perhaps Philip was teasing him again.

He was tempted to tell Philip that he guessed he would roll in. There weren't any Indians around camp, anyway. They wouldn't steal mules or bother a camp, when they could hunt buffaloes.

No, it would never do to quit before his time was up. He would never hear the last of that all his life. He must stick it out.

That gun was getting awfully heavy. What was the use of trotting back and forth all the time? No need of it. He might as well sit down against a wagon where he could watch just as well.

Little Ted had his eyes and ears set for the stealthy approach of Pawnees and Comanches, but he did not know how softly and silently a friendly old god from Mount Olympus, conqueror and consoler of tired men, can creep upon his victims.

Both Burley and Philip soon discovered why their enthusiastic fellow-sentry, Ted, had stopped walking his beat like a soldier. They planned to cure him in this way of his desire for guard duty. They would let him sleep until it was time to be relieved. They would not give him away, but they would make him promise that he would not pester them again about standing guard or doing anything else at those hours of the night, when a youngster of his age ought to be in his blankets.

A shower had threatened, but it was now

passing north of the camp, while below the clouds the moon was again visible and relieved somewhat the uncanny darkness that had prevailed.

Suddenly there came the loud boom of a gun, immediately followed by a screaming yell from Ted's high-pitched voice. Philip and Burley ran to the wagon where they had left him scarcely ten minutes ago.

"I,—I shot at an Indian," the lad gasped. "He—he—was a big fellow. He w-was coming at me with his hatchet."

"Where is he?" asked Burley. "Did you drop him?"

"I,—I don't know. I think he ran. I guess I missed him."

By this time the whole camp was awake and in commotion.

"Where's my gun?" came from half a dozen men.

"Confound you, Shorty, drop my gun right there. Take your own old blunderbuss!" one crusty driver called out to another.

WHY TED HAD STOPPED WALKING HIS BEAT LIKE A SOLDIER.
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"What's the row about, boys?" asked Captain Harley. "Did you see Indians?"

Burley told what had happened, but did not mention that they had seen the young guardsman leaning against a wheel and sound asleep.

Ted told again how he had fired at a big Indian, who was coming straight for him with a tomahawk.

"I guess you're mistaken, sonny," the Captain chuckled. "The ponies would not be grazing so quietly if there were any Indians prowling about."

The men remained at their posts for a little while, but none could hear or see anything suspicious, except that the howls of the big gray wolves were mixed with the wails of the coyotes.

"It's a false alarm, men," the wagon master finally decided. "All go back to bed, but it's time for the midnight relief.

"Don't dream about any more Indians," he added quietly aside to Ted.

However, he instructed the men to watch with great care and said that he would stay up a while, too.

"When you hear the big wolves," he added, "the buffaloes are not far away, and where you meet buffaloes, you are likely to run into Indians. Wolves, buffaloes, and Indians form a sort of wild plains trinity.

The men all went back to bed, and their snoring soon showed how little their nerves had been affected by the real or imaginary danger. Most of them had taken the interruption of their rest good-naturedly, only a few grouchy ones had grumbled about the idea of putting a fool kid on guard duty. An hour, and almost another hour passed without anything disturbing the peace of the corral.

It was almost two o'clock when one of the guards heard a rumbling like distant thunder north of the camp. He called the attention of the other guard to it, who also heard it plainly, and the sound seemed to be growing louder and coming nearer, while they were listening.

The men called the wagon-master, who was on his feet at once and listened.

"Buffalo stampede!" he called out. "Get up, men! They are coming right upon us from the north, thousands of them. Get your ponies inside, boys!

"Men of the first section run out to the west side of the camp. Fire at the beasts, yell at them to turn them west.

"Six men run over to the herd. Keep them together. If they get mixed with the buffaloes, we'll never see them again. The rest of you guard the camp!"

The previous false alarm had been a good thing for the camp in showing up every man who was not ready. At this call every man was ready and acted quickly.

Ted and Philip were the first to reach the herd and being mounted, they could quickly ride around the herd and help much to hold them together, while the stampeding buffaloes thundered past them a quarter of a mile to the west. But in spite of the efforts of the night-herders and of the boys, a few of

the extra mules and oxen broke away to join the mad stampede of the buffaloes.

When the noise of the thundering, bellowing wild herd had died away, Captain Harley ordered all the stock to be brought inside the corral.

"I have a suspicion," he told the men, "these buffaloes did not stampede of their own accord. Some Indians started them to stampede our mules and oxen. In a fine fix we would be if we had lost our stock."

Once inside the corral the animals soon became quiet and many of the oxen lay down and quietly chewed the cud.

Half a dozen men were detailed for guard duty, the others rolled up in their blankets, for there was still more than an hour of darkness.

When daylight broke, not a buffalo was seen anywhere, nor was there a sign or trace of Indians near the camp.

"Confound those red rogues," commented Burley, "if it wasn't for the buffalo meat the men are bringing in, I would say the whole

camp had had a bad case of nightmare. You don't see a sign of Indians around, but I feel sure that they drove the buffaloes straight for our camp herd."

It was decided to remain a day at Walnut Creek to give time for curing the buffalo meat, which had, so to speak, stampeded into camp and was much needed.

When the stock was turned out again soon after daylight, Ted noticed some blood on his pony's neck.

"Look here, Mr. Burley," he called to his friend, "what is the matter with my pony?"

The experienced plainsman looked a minute at the animal. "That pony," he replied in a low voice but with a twinkle in his eye. "That pony had a blasted close run from a wild Indian last night. The bullet took a nip out of his ear. Do you see this?" and he pointed to a nick in the pony's left ear.

"You want to be a little careful, Sonny, shooting from the saddle. He may be a little gun-shy for a while, till he sort of forgets the close call he had last night."

Ted knew what Burley meant and who the Indian was that had fired at his pony.

The wagon-master ordered four men to herd the cattle close to the corral. "At the first sign of danger you bring them in," he impressed upon the men. "We must not lose any more animals."

Then he called Burley and Philip aside and told them the real reason why he wished to stay a whole day in camp.

"I want you two and three other men to ride a few miles along the ridges on either side of the Walnut Creek and scout for Indian signs. But keep away from the timber and the brush. After you have done that, ride a few miles along the trail toward Pawnee Rock, our next camp. Be careful and keep together. Jim, you take charge and pick the men you want and slip away kind of quietly. You can take Ted along, if you want to. He seems to be able to stick in the saddle pretty well."

"Do you want us to knock over any buffaloes, if we see any?" asked Philip.

"No, don't go near them. We have meat enough for a week or more. Hunting is too dangerous around here. If I hear you shooting, I shall know you are in a scrap with Indians. I feel that they are lurking around us somewhere.

"Now be careful that you don't ride into a trap."

"Aren't we going to look for our lost stock?" asked Philip.

"No, sir," the captain told him. "The critters are miles away by this time and it would be impossible to find them in the buffalo herds. Let them go. The Pawnees or Comanches will get them some day."

CHAPTER VII

CATCHING AN ARROW

BURLEY and his men slipped out of camp as quietly as possible. The hunters brought in loads of fresh meat, and the men in camp dried and smoked it on frames of poles over a slow fire. To dry and cure meat as the Indian often did on the dry plains by simply exposing it to the sun and the air would have taken too much time.

Burley's scouting party rode cautiously along the north side of Walnut Creek, then crossed over and doubled back to camp on the south side. They saw no big game except a small herd of antelopes, on which Ted and Philip wanted very much to try the speed of their ponies, but Burley would not listen to their pleas that old Doc had not forbidden them to hunt antelopes.

"No, lads, it won't do," he decided. "Doc

meant that we should not hunt, so you don't. If anything happened to you, I should always blame myself for it."

The party scared up a jack-rabbit, who ran over the nearest ridge in long leisurely bounds. A prairie-hen arose with a great whirr of wings from a nest containing twenty eggs. Finding that the eggs were fresh, Ted quickly gathered them in, except one.

"Hens can't count," he said. "If we leave her one, she will lay some more. The men of our mess will sure like some fresh eggs for supper."

When they crossed the creek they saw a big wild turkey on a tree and Ted wanted very much to bring it down, but Burley said: "Nothing doing, Sonny, you aren't at home with your mother. No hunting means no shooting."

"May I go and look for his nest?" asked Ted.

"You may," Burley grunted, "if you want to risk losing your hair." So Ted contented himself with turning around in the saddle and

watching the turkey as long as he could see him.

On their way back they saw neither Indians nor game, but a few black buzzards, hanging on motionless wings, were sailing westward, while a pair of large birds, which Burley said were ravens, were also slowly flapping westward in the direction of Pawnee Rock.

"Well, boys, what did you see?" Captain Harley asked when the scouts entered camp.

"Not a thing, Captain," Ted blurted out, "except a rabbit, a prairie-chicken, and a turkey. We've got the eggs of the chicken. Yes, and some antelopes."

The men smiled at Ted's unconscious forwardness, but said nothing.

"We saw some turkey-buzzards and a pair of ravens," Burley added. "They were flying toward Pawnee Rock."

"Well," mused the old man, "I don't know what to think of it. You saw buzzards and ravens, which means Indians. The buffaloes are moving north now. When they get scared they stampede back on their trails. I feel

that some Indians stampeded them last night, but it's sort of queer that you saw no smoke or sign of them.

"I tell you what you do," he continued after a moment's silence. "You ride down to the herders and tell them to water the stock and then herd them back to the corral, they are getting too far away.

"Then scout along the trail, but do not go farther than Three-Mile Ridge. Jim, you know the place I mean, the little ridge with the stone grave to the north of the trail. If you see or jump any Indians come back to camp as quick as you can, and look out that you don't get cut off.

"Tell the herders to hurry back with the cattle. There is plenty of good grass near camp; they don't need to stray away off in the river bottom."

The scouts, after delivering the captain's orders to the herders, cautiously followed the trail westward.

When they came close to the low ridge, Burley stopped.

"Look, men," he asked, "isn't that smoke away off to the southwest over the Arkansas bottom?"

The men soon made out a thin column of smoke rising high in the still air.

"Confound them," muttered Burley. "It's a Pawnee or Comanche camp, but the smoke is not from their camp-fires. It is a signal smoke. I don't know what it means, but most likely it tells that a train of wagons is coming west.

"Let us scout up to the ridge; I'll ride ahead."

When Burley reached the ridge, he motioned to the men to come on. They were all halting in a group and watching the distant signal smoke, when suddenly a gun cracked in the tall dead grass to their left, while an arrow whizzed out from behind the stone grave.

"Turn back," ordered Burley. "Look to your right, men, they are trying to cut us off."

Half a dozen mounted Indians came racing

from behind some bushes in the Arkansas River bottom.

But the ponies of the Indians had evidently not yet recovered from their winter diet of cottonwood bark, and were not equal in speed to the ponies and mules of the scouts.

"Stop and give them a shot, lads," Burley ordered, when he saw that the Indians could not cut them off from camp.

Ted and Philip lost no time obeying the order. One of the Indians ducked as if he heard a bullet sing overhead. Apparently none of them were hit, but they stopped following the scouts and soon disappeared behind the willow bushes in the river bottom.

"Was anybody hurt?" asked Burley. "Look, you don't always feel it when you are excited."

Nobody was wounded, but an arrow was found sticking in Ted's saddle.

"I'll keep that and show it to Father. May I, Mr. Burley?" Ted asked.

"Of course, you may," Burley replied. "Well, boys," he continued, "that was close

enough. If we had been careless they would have scalped us all."

Ted instinctively felt for his scalp. "Gosh," he whispered to Philip, "my hair is surely growing fast."

Philip took his excited brother aside.

"Look here, Ted," he warned him, "when we get back to camp don't you start in again to do the talking. It's Burley's business to talk. You keep mum. Just remember you aren't the cock of the walk here as with Mother at home."

Ted blushed, but he felt that Philip was right and that he had been pretty fresh at home with his mother and Uncle Jethro.

There was excitement in camp when the scouts told what had happened.

Several men wanted Ted's arrow, but Burley cut short their requests by saying:

"The kid caught it and it's his. Don't pester him for it. If you fellows will just hike out to the ridge, you can catch one yourselves. The Pawnee buck is still waiting for you behind the stone grave."

"Yes, let's do that," came from several voices. "I'll go, I will. Can we go, Doc?"

"Close up men, close up!" the captain replied. "Go back to your buffalo beef. I warrant you'll all see plenty of Indians and arrows before you get back to chew the rag in old Jack's store."

"I'll bet the kid was all-blasted scared," remarked a rough driver who went by the title of Mex, because he used to tell great stories about his life in Mexico. Mex did not like Ted, and had several times threatened that some day he would take the conceit out of that fresh little kid.

This time Burley came to Ted's rescue. "Maybe he was scared," Burley admitted. "I'm sorry you weren't there, Mex. You could have shown us how to scare the whole bunch by yelling and making faces at them as you did in Chihuahua.

"For a while I was pretty well scared myself," he continued. "I was afraid the rascals would cut us off."

"The stock goes inside the corral to-night,"

Captain Harley ordered after supper. "All of it, your ponies, too, boys.

"Smith and Mex, before you go off duty at midnight you call me. I feel sure the country is full of Indians, and they are trying their best to take us at a disadvantage.

"Those two fellows on the ridge must have been a couple of young bucks, for the wise old warriors would never have betrayed their presence till the men had passed them."

Nothing occurred to disturb the quiet of the camp during the evening. On the prairie the meadow-larks whistled as they do on the Kansas fields to-day, and in the trees on Walnut Creek the brown thrush with its burst of varied melody seemed trying to drown the more modest tunes of robin and catbird.

The early prairie flowers dotted the plain with purple and lavender; and for gopher, woodchuck, and badger the season of humble work and play was once more in full swing, after a long winter sleep in their prairie dugouts.

On days of travel the men were generally

so tired that there was little inclination for sociability, but on this evening they lingered at the mess-fires chatting and smoking, while the sun disappeared in a flood of gold and crimson.

Although the men did not doubt the presence of Indians in the region, none of them expected a night attack and most of them were inclined to make light of the fighting qualities of the Red Men.

Until midnight there were no signs or sounds about the camp which would have disturbed an old plainsman. True, the camp was not as quiet as when the stock was away. Oxen and mules grunted as they lay down. Now a mule snorted or an ox emitted a short bellow as he was pushed or gored by an ill-tempered fellow-bovine. The herd had had all day to fill up on grass and water, so that all but a few restless beasts were quite content to lie down for the night. None of these sounds, however, disturbed the sleep of the men; as long as the beasts did not start braying or trumpeting they might grunt and snort

all they wanted. Nerves, as city people know them, the old plainsmen had none.

After midnight some of the men did wake up from the violent barking of Old Doc's dog.

Romp was a long-legged brindled mongrel not well liked in camp, because he showed no affection for anybody but his master.

"I'd like to pisen that cur," muttered Mex. "What's Doc got the brute for?"

Romp was not afraid of the prowling coyotes. If they came too close to camp he drove them to a respectful distance. If possible he hated the gray wolves still more than he hated the coyotes; but he had enough dog sense to know that the gray wolf of the plains is the master of all canines, so he contented himself with barking violently at them when they prowled near camp. At such times he would run to his master with all the signs of urgently requesting his assistance.

"Oh, why don't you come and shoot him?" he seemed to be trying to say. "Come along now! I can't bear to have him

around!" And away he would rush again. But when the wolf turned and clacked his terrible fangs, Romp always remembered that he was only a dog.

Several times that night Captain Harley was tempted to go to the aid of Romp, who pleaded more urgently than ever. It seemed that the two wolves, who prowled about camp to-night had roused all the anger a dog's soul could hold. However, a gunshot would arouse the whole camp, and the Captain did not wish to be responsible for a false alarm.

At daylight he went to look at the wolf-tracks, but the beasts had not made as much as a toe-mark.

"Romp," he called, "they didn't fool you last night, but they fooled me. Drat their souls, if those wolves weren't Indians rattling buffalo bones at you!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE HAUNT OF EVIL SPIRITS

IN the morning there was a kind of informal council of war. The question which Captain Harley put to Burley and a few good men was: Should they go on or wait a few days longer at this camp?

"The Indians are out for mischief, that is sure," he told the men. "They may tackle us here, they may try us out on the trail, or they may fall upon us at Pawnee Rock. They are around us, that's sure."

"Yes, they come and go like the coyotes," commented Burley. "They may decide that we are the wrong kind of a bunch for them and melt away. I'm for moving on, Captain. We know as much now as we shall know tomorrow."

Half an hour later the train moved out. The brush of the scouting party with the In-

dians on Three-Mile Ridge, and the knowledge that two Indian scouts in wolf-skins had hovered around their camp for a good part of the night, put every man on the alert. All felt sure that the Indians, whoever they might be, Pawnees, Comanches, or Cheyennes knew exactly the strength and the habits of the train.

The white men on the other hand did not know whether there was a large Indian camp farther up the Arkansas or whether those they had seen belonged to a small band of marauders.

Harley himself and Burley rode ahead of the train and saw to it that the wagons stayed so close together that they could form a corral in a few minutes. The men all carried their rifles on the outside of the wagons, and many of them carried a loaded pistol in the belt besides. Philip and Ted with Kansas Joe, the extra man, brought up the rear of the train.

The wagon-master had feared that some ambushed Indians would attempt to stampede

the cattle if they were driven for water to the creek or the river.

"Those two fellows who fooled me last night with their rattles," he told Burley, "were not the only ones around. The rest of the bunch, I feel sure, are hiding in the brush on Walnut Creek or on the Arkansas. So we'll just fool them and not take the cattle to water this morning. We have had plenty of rain lately and I think we shall find enough water in holes and buffalo-wallows between here and Pawnee Rock."

In this expectation he was not disappointed. Late April and May is the rainy season on that part of the Great Plains, when shallow depressions and buffalo-wallows are filled with water, while later in the season in July and August, the traveler would not find a drop, except in the Arkansas River and in the larger creeks, and he might even have to dig for it in such streams as Sand Creek and the Cimarron.

At this time of the year the buffalo calves are born. The new grass begins to grow and

the buffaloes used to start on their northward journey, which extended as far north as the Peace River Valley in Canada.

The new men in the train were again disappointed in their hope of having a brush with the Indians. Not a sign of them was seen. The train wound along slowly and Ted had plenty of time to ask Kansas Joe about the buffalo-wallows and the so-called fairy rings seen everywhere along the train.

"The buffalo-wallows, I think," Joe said, "the big beasts made themselves. In the rainy season they paw and roll in the water and the mud and carry some of the mud away. In the dry season they also paw up the ground and roll in the dust. Then the wind blows the dust away and the wallow is made a little deeper and larger every year."

"Doesn't the wind blow some of the dust into the wallows?" asked Ted.

"Well, yes, it might do that," admitted Joe. "But not as much as it blows out. And the buffaloes also carry some of the dust away in their shaggy hair."

Ted could not see how the buffaloes made the fairy rings, which looked like small round race tracks.

"They are made," Joe told him, "in spring, when the calves are born. The wolves are always trying to get the very young calves and their mothers, before the calves are old enough to travel along with the herd. Then several bulls walk around the cow and her little brown calf day and night, until the calf is strong enough to go along with the herd. If it wasn't for that, the wolves would soon kill off all the buffaloes in the country."

On some of the mesas of the Bad Lands and in other undisturbed prairie lands of the west, the old buffalo-wallows and fairy rings may be seen to this day, where the wild cattle trampled them out half a century or more ago. But they are overgrown with grass like the right-of-way of abandoned railroads. The grass is generally of a coarser and greener kind than the short buffalo grasses of the plains.

The train reached the camp site at Pawnee

Rock in good time. Pawnee Rock was a bold cliff of red sandstone, which rose some fifteen or twenty feet above the plain, and was, so to speak, the abrupt ending of a long ridge. The trail passed between the rock and the Arkansas, whose valley at this place is about two miles wide.

The trains generally took their stock down the Arkansas for water, but as the stock in Harley's train had had plenty of water in the afternoon and there were plenty of water-holes on the prairie, the Captain told the herders to let the animals graze close to the corral and not take them down to the river.

The cooks had brought a supply of wood and water from Walnut Creek, so there was no need for anybody to stray far from camp.

"I suppose," said the Captain after supper, "that we have to leave the critters out over night. They haven't had any food since midnight, and if we corral them again, they will be bellowing and milling around and keep us all awake. I don't like to leave them out because I think I smell Indians."

"Phil," asked Ted when the two boys were alone, "do you believe that Old Doc can really smell Indians?"

"I don't suppose he can," answered Philip with a laugh. "I suppose he meant that he sort of felt in his bones that there were Indians around."

About two in the morning the wagon-master arose and asked the boys and Burley to ride with him to the herd.

"The Old Man has got something on his mind," whispered Burley to Philip, "but I don't think we'll have any trouble. The Reds have just got on the Old Man's nerves."

Things went on quietly. The cattle were slowly herded back and turned toward the opening of the corral. Here and there the coyotes howled as usual, but the big gray wolves seemed to have disappeared.

It was some time after three o'clock, when suddenly a horde of Indians seemed to spring out of the ground yelling like maniacs and shaking blankets and robes in an attempt to stampede the stock toward the river.

"Rush them to the corral!" shouted Harley as he fired his gun at the nearest Indian.

The men from the camp came running out, spreading out on either side of the herd. One Indian who had gotten between the herd and the corral was shot down, while the stock broke with a mad rush not for the river, but straight into the corral.

The whole thing was over in five minutes, and the Indians had disappeared as quickly as they had come.

"Are we all here?" asked the Captain as soon as the men got back to the corral. All had returned.

"Now," the Captain ordered, "take your places; they may tackle us again."

In about half an hour when it was just light enough to see, horsemen came swarming up from the river. There seemed to be at least a hundred of them.

"They're coming!" the men called to one another. "A thousand of them!"

"Keep your fire, men," Harley called out, "till I give the word."

On the Indians came, waving blankets and yelling like demons.

"Let 'em yell," muttered Harley. "We'll make 'em howl if they come close enough!"

The Indians as was their custom began to ride around the corral, coming a little closer all the time. The men could see now that most of them carried bows and arrows, but a few had guns. Pretty soon they began to shoot their arrows and fire their guns into the corral, and the men were becoming impatient to reply. But the Captain called: "Wait a bit, boys, wait a bit, and take good aim!"

The next time they came around Harley called:

"First squad, blaze away!"

A dozen guns cracked almost at once. Three men fell off their ponies, while several horses reared and plunged as if they had been hard hit. The Indians quickly picked up their fallen comrades and rode off toward the river.

"They will not come back," predicted Bur-

ley, "unless they have a big camp near by. This bunch got enough bad medicine."

"What were they?" asked the boys.

"Pawnees, to judge from their trappings and yells."

Two of the men had been slightly wounded and several of the cattle and mules had arrows sticking in their skins.

After this skirmish none of the new men made fun of Harley's caution, for they all realized that with a careless or inexperienced leader they would have lost their stock and goods and probably their lives.

When the first red rays of the sun fell on the sides of the white canvas wagons, the prairie and the valley of the Arkansas lay spread out in all the idyllic glory and beauty of an early summer morning with not a sign of war or hostile savages.

The men in high spirits had a feast of hot coffee, buffalo-meat, and biscuits, and when after an hour no Indian had been seen, the stock was turned out to feed on the rich young grass.

As there was plenty of water for the stock near the corral, the captain thought it safest not to move before the Pawnees had been given time to get out of the country.

"But if we don't see any more of them," he told the men, "we are off for Pawnee Fork at daybreak to-morrow.

"This camp is a regular robbers' roost. It has the worst reputation of all the camps on the whole long route. Some old plainsmen claim that Pawnee Rock is the haunt of evil spirits. They say the soul of every bad Indian that ever roamed these prairies lives under the ridge back of Pawnee Rock."

CHAPTER IX

TO PAWNEE FORK

THERE was now a whole day ahead of the men in the train with no definite duties to perform. Such days, unless they came too often on account of bad weather or high water at the fords, were generally welcome. The men rested and made up sleep, they repaired and washed their clothing, they put wagons, loads, and harnesses in good shape, and those who were so inclined tried their luck at hunting, if the wagon-master permitted it.

The oxen and mules that were compelled to work in the day-time and find food and rest at night, were always benefited by a day of rest.

Ted and Philip and a few men like Burley, who were still boys at heart, cast about for some activity to fill their time and minds.

The white, hummocky sand-hills south of the Arkansas had attracted the boys' fancy ever since the trail struck the river at the Great Bend.

"Captain, could we ride over and explore them?" asked Philip. "Burley would go with us."

"You would find nothing, boys, but sand and rattlesnakes, and you will see the sand-hills pretty soon when we cross the Arkansas for the Long Dry Route to the Cimarron."

"But we might find some buffaloes or antelopes," suggested Ted.

"No, you can't go hunting," the Captain decided. "Before you know, the Pawnees might be hunting you. You had better all stick around camp to-day. I feel pretty sure that some of them are watching us."

The Captain, however, had no objection to the boys and Burley sauntering along the ridge that ran back from Pawnee Rock.

"Do you know who is buried under those two stone piles?" asked Ted.

Burley did not know. The graves had been

there as long as he had traveled over the trail.

"You will find some lone graves all the way to Santa Fé," he informed the boys.

"Were all those men killed by Indians?" Ted wanted to know.

"Most of them were," Burley replied, "and if their friends had not piled rocks on their graves the coyotes would have dug them out in a hurry."

The boys wanted to know if Burley knew of any fights that had taken place at Pawnee Rock. Yes, Burley knew of plenty of them.

Several years before, three trappers that were going east with their pack-loads of fur from the mountains were caught at Pawnee Rock by half a hundred Cheyennes.

"Three white men by fifty Indians?" asked Ted.

"Yes, that's right; if you don't want to believe it, boy, you needn't listen.

"The trappers were dead shots and had plenty of ammunition and every time they fired an Indian rolled over dead, but the

Cheyennes kept the trappers on the rock all afternoon and all night.

"At first the trappers were very much afraid that the Indians would kill their mules, but the Indians did not try to kill them. They thought they could get the mules and the furs after they had killed the men."

"Fifty Indians and three white men!" exclaimed Ted. "Why didn't they just rush at them and capture them?"

"That isn't the way Indians fight," explained Burley. "Now keep still, kid, and let me finish.

"In the morning the Indians tied blankets and brush to their ponies and tried to get within range of their arrows and old guns, but the trappers dropped so many of the ponies that the others stampeded and ran away.

"After a while the Indians returned again, and this time they began to set fire to the prairie. It was very early in the season and there was only the tall dead grass of the year before.

"The trappers took their mules to the side of the rock, where they were somewhat sheltered from the wind. Then they started a back fire close to the edge of the rock; and hid behind a ledge, while the wind drove the black smoke and the cinders from the big fire over their heads.

"When the smoke cleared away they found their mules with hair and tails badly singed, but not really hurt.

"Most of the Indians now went back to their camp, but enough of them stayed so that the trappers could not get away, and they had to stay another day on the rock without food or water. They had but little ammunition left now, and they expected the Cheyennes would come back in the afternoon with some new deviltry scheme and that they would finally get their scalps after all.

"But toward evening the Indians all rode away and pretty soon the trappers saw a caravan coming from Santa Fé. The Indians had also seen this caravan and had at last given up the fight."

In the middle of the forenoon Captain Harley gave orders to hitch up. "We might as well move," he said to Burley and the boys. "If the Reds bother us too much, we can corral and stand them off."

Burley and the wagon-master were the only men in the train who knew why Philip and Ted had joined the train.

"You lads will want some time to look for 'signs' at our next camp at Pawnee Fork. If your father and his partner had a fight there with the Indians, we ought to be able to find a clue of some kind. We are the first train out from Independence and we have met nobody from Santa Fé."

The train made the sixteen miles to Pawnee Fork without any difficulty, although every man was constantly on the lookout for Indians. It seemed that they had vanished as suddenly as they had come.

As soon as the camp had been established, Burley, the wagon-master, and the two boys began to look for signs of the fight about which Crooked Horn and the blacksmith at

Council Grove had told. After making sure that no Indians were concealed in the brush and small timber along the creek, the four rode carefully over every rod of ground.

"I guess we're up against it," remarked Burley. "It is like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"No, it is like looking for a surveyor's carpet-tack in the brush," replied Harley. "Jim, did you ever help a surveyor find the carpet-tack driven into an old stake, which marks a line somebody had run through the brush a year or two ago? You know the rusty little thing is there, but you have to get down on your hands and knees to find it."

Pretty soon the cook called supper. After supper the four men searched again till dark for half a mile up the creek without finding anything, except the sites of some old campfires.

In the morning they renewed their search down the fork toward the river with the same result. They were about ready to give

up and resume their journey, when Philip thought he saw a dark object in a copse of scrub box-elders.

"Come here, men!" he called. "I think I have found something."

"Only a piece of an old blanket," Burley said as he turned it over with his foot.

"No, look Philip," Ted half whispered, "it's a piece of Mr. Fridley's coat. I remember the buttons it had on when he and Father left."

In the meantime Harley was busy with something a rod away in a wild cherry thicket.

"Have you found anything, Captain," asked Burley.

"Come over here," Harley requested.

"There they are," he pointed out. "Human bones. All the coyotes have left."

Before the train moved, the four men buried the bones and piled some rocks on the grave to mark the spot.

There could no longer be any doubt about the truth of Crooked Horn's story.

"We'll hitch up now," said Harley, when

they had returned from the new lone grave. "We may meet some friendly Indians or some Mexicans from Santa Fé who may be able to tell us more if—if we can get them to talk."

CHAPTER X

THROUGH A HAILSTORM

ALTHOUGH no signs of Indians had been seen since the train left Pawnee Rock, the men were instructed not to string out too far, and to keep themselves ready for trouble.

The trail continues southwestward from Pawnee Fork, and soon runs up a small stream known as Coon Creek, on the fork of which the caravan made the next camp.

The country assumed now more and more the aspect of an endless, unbroken prairie. The grass was much shorter than it had been farther east, and it began to appear in bunches like the typical buffalo grass of the western plains.

"It grows like little green brushes," remarked Ted. "Isn't it too short for the cattle?"

"Not at all," Burley informed him.

"They like it better than the tall grass, and they grow fat on it, if you give them enough time to graze."

"It is even good in winter if the snow does not cover it too deep; for it generally dries on the stalk and is as nourishing as good hay."

Large trees had now entirely disappeared; only groves and patches of small cottonwoods, box-elders, and cherries grew straggling along the streams, while they could just see the green valley of the Arkansas and its sand-hills more than ten miles to the south.

In the afternoon Captain Harley was riding about half a mile ahead of the train, while Burley and the two boys were bringing up the rear. The day was intensely hot. The big canvas-covered wagons were slowly creeping along the trail, with the oxen panting and the mules sweating in the heat. On the prairie scarcely a sign of life was visible, except when the grayish-yellow prairie dogs hopped from one burrow to another; and while curiously eyeing the train, accompanied

the flipping of their funny little tails with loud, sharp whistling and scolding, as if they resented the intrusion of man on their prairie solitude.

Some distance ahead of the train a gray cloud was rapidly forming and the men could soon see sharp flashes of lightning shoot down upon the plain, followed by a heavy rumbling of thunder. Then the wind stopped blowing and an ominous calm descended over the trail.

"That cloud looks like it had a twister or something in it," commented Burley. "I don't like the ashiness of it."

Now Captain Harley was coming back and was evidently giving some order to the drivers, for they began to turn off to the right of the trail.

Very soon Burley and the lads could hear the captain shout: "Turn out to the right, men, and form a half-circle. We are going to meet a cyclone or an earthquake. There's a roaring and rumbling ahead like a buffalo stampede."

The train had just come to a halt, when the cloud was above them. A heavy wind sprang up, and a few scattered hailstones, as large as walnuts, struck the prairie and bounced back over the wagons.

"Hail," shouted the wagon-master. "Look out, men, don't let your teams break away!"

Within a few minutes the hailstorm broke upon men and beasts with all its fury. The rumbling of the hail on the wagons and on the ground drowned the shouts of the men, who tried their best to keep the maddened animals from breaking away or becoming tangled up.

"Whoa, boys, whoa, boys!" shouted the drivers and cracked their whips in the faces of the animals that tried to break away and run madly for shelter with the wind.

A few hailstones had almost the size of a man's fist and the poor animal that was struck by one of them bellowed with pain.

For ten or fifteen minutes the uproar continued, a confused noise of storm, hail, and

rain, of the shouts of men and the bellowing grunts of cattle. So thick fell the hail, and rain that no man could see from his leading team to his wagon.

When the commotion was over the hail in some places, where it had been washed and blown together, lay a foot thick.

The storm ceased as suddenly as it had broken, and each man began to look over his wagon and animals. There was no wagon without holes in the canvas, where a big hailstone had gone through, and almost every animal showed some swollen or bleeding bruises. The men had escaped serious injury by hiding behind the animals or the wagons.

"Where's Fleming and his mules?" somebody asked. "I thought he headed in to my right."

"Well, where is he?" several others asked.

The Captain came riding by to see how the train had come through.

"Where on earth are Fleming and his mules?" he asked. "He is not at the other end of the line."

"Wait here, men," he added. "I will go and look for him. Those infernal eastern mules! I wish I had dumped them into the Missouri!"

"Come on, boys," he called to Burley and the lads, "we have to hurry, if we are going to catch up with them."

They found Fleming a few hundred yards north of the trail, knocked senseless by a big hailstone.

Captain Harley stayed with the unconscious man and asked his companions to ride on and bring in the missing wagon and mules.

After a little while Fleming came to. "How my head aches!" were the first words he said. "Where am I? Is that you, Doc? Or am I dreaming?"

"It's Old Doc himself," Harley assured him. "You are still on earth, Fleming. We just found you half a mile off the trail."

"What in blazes happened to me?" asked Fleming.—"Oh, yes," after a few minutes, "now I remember. My mules started to break away in the storm, and I guess a hail-

stone knocked me down. Where are those mules? It seems to me they headed north, but I don't know. All I remember is that I tried to stop them."

"The boys and Jim have gone after them. They'll soon bring them in. You had better get on my mule and we'll go to camp."

When they reached the camp the men crowded around Fleming to learn what had happened to him. Most of the other men had sore spots on their bodies and heads, but none had been knocked senseless. Harley then told the men to drive on a few miles so that they could find dry buffalo chips for their camp-fires, for he knew that a hailstorm never covers more than a narrow strip of country. In fact it is often only a fraction of a mile wide.

"No need," he added, "to wait for Fleming's wagon. Jim and the boys will see that we have gone on and they will soon bring in the runaway mules."

So the train moved on about two miles and the cooks soon had the coffee simmering and

the buffalo steak broiling over a hot glowing fire of buffalo fuel.

The men were in fine spirit after their adventure and exchanged experiences, swapped yarns, as they called it, about the worst storms and the biggest hailstones they had ever seen.

"Gol dern you, Pete!" one of the men addressed Shawnee Pete. "I bet you never stuck your nose out of the canvas. I guess you never woke up!"

Pete said he had stuck out his head, but he admitted that he drew it in again "almighty quick," for he hadn't hired out to stop hailstones with his head.

The men finished their supper, and Shawnee Pete and his helper for the night rode out after the cattle. The men were in a talkative mood. All kinds of stories were exchanged and the talk turned upon Santa Fé and Mexico, for in those days Santa Fé was still within Mexican territory. Would the tax of $500 a wagon be still in force? If so, they would combine two or three loads before

they entered the old adobe town and burn the empty wagons. Would Old Doc hide his export gold and silver in hollow axle-trees as some of the traders did, or was he too honest to evade the outrageous export duty on gold and silver coin?

What sort of a time would they have in the old Mexican town? They would all do the fandango with the Spanish beauties, of course. A fellow wants a little fun after he has been hoofing it over the trail for three months.

"Have your fun, you young fellows," an old gray-headed driver counselled, "but don't let the Taos lightning tangle your legs."

Then the talk drifted to the trials that were likely still ahead of them, for they were now nearing the half way camp of the crossing of the Arkansas, that is if Old Doc took the dry route by way of the Cimarron. He most likely would. Old Doc never wasted any time.

Would they have trouble in crossing the Arkansas? The water was likely to be high

and the quicksands would bother the mules quite a bit; but Doc would find a way of getting them across.

Would they get into any "water scrape" if they took the Cimarron route? Anyhow there would be sixty-five miles from the Arkansas to the Cimarron, where there would not be a drop of water for the stock.

While this talk was going on among the men, the Captain and Fleming were beginning to feel uneasy about the runaway team and the three men.

"We ought to see them by this time," Harley declared as he scanned the horizon to the northeast. "I hope they haven't fallen in with any savages. I'm afraid I should not have let them go, especially the boys. The sun will be down in an hour; and if they don't show up pretty soon, I'll go after them myself."

Another half-hour passed and still no men or mules were to be seen, and several men volunteered to go with the Captain in search of the men and animals.

The sun had just set when they saw three horsemen outlined against the crimson sky.

"Well, I'll be hanged," muttered Harley, "if they aren't coming back without the wagon! Where on earth can those crazy beasts have gone? Can't have sunk into the prairie? Surely that's Jim and the lads. I can tell little Ted on the pony and Jim on his big mule. Those aren't Indians, are they, men?"

The men agreed that the coming horsemen were not Indians.

The three horsemen now headed directly for the Captain and his men.

"Doc," reported Burley as soon as they met, "it sounds all-fired strange, but never a hair or a hoof did we see of those dog-gasted mules."

For a moment the wagon-master was speechless, then he gave vent to a string of strong invectives on mules in general and on Fleming's string in particular.

"Well, boys," he ended, catching his breath, "come along and get some supper.

You must be half starved. Hang it if I don't go after them myself in the morning. I guess the blasted fool critters will have stopped running by sunrise!''

CHAPTER XI

THE LOST WAGON

NEXT morning the Captain placed Burley in charge of the train with instructions to move in close order and with great caution. At a place known as The Caches the train was to make camp and wait for the Captain, if he had not joined them before they reached The Caches.

Harley himself asked the two lads and Fleming to go with him in search of the lost wagon. They rode at a brisk pace back to their "Hail Camp," as the boys called the place and tried to find a trail of the lost wagon.

"It would be all-fired queer," vowed the old wagon-master, "if we could not find the trail of a three-ton prairie schooner and ten mules. Bless your soul, the critters can't

crawl into a badger hole and they can't fly! We must catch sight of them somewhere."

So all four of them rode back and forth between the stopping-place and a branch of Coon Creek, but not a track of a wagon could they find. Then they followed up the branch of the creek westward, expecting every moment to catch sight of the wagon lying on its side in the bed or gully of the small stream. They doubled back in a half-circle around the head of the branch and rode eastward along the divide between Coon Creek and Pawnee Fork.

The Captain was in a truly grim humor now.

"Fleming," he said, "look yonder. Do you see that coyote about a mile away driving a jack-rabbit ahead of him?"

After some careful directions Fleming and the boys saw the coyote but they could not find the jack.

"Drat these infernal plains!" the old man broke out. "I can see a gopher half a mile away, why in thunder can't I see a ten-mule team with a house behind them? They must

be here somewhere. The beasts couldn't eat the wagon and then crawl into the ground like prairie dogs!"

Fleming and the boys were almost hopelessly puzzled. They scanned the prairie and the horizon east and west, north and south; they searched the ground for tracks of the big wheels; but nothing was to be seen. They rode closer toward Pawnee Fork and crossed innumerable buffalo trails, where for centuries the great wild herds had gone to water. They did find the tracks of some Indian ponies that had gone north along one of the trails.

"There!" exclaimed Harley, "that was the bunch that thought they would like our stock. Look at your guns, boys. They may be taking a rest in the brush along the Fork somewhere."

"How do you know, Captain," asked Philip, "that they were not just a bunch of wild ponies?"

"Their tracks cut in too deep. That shows they carried riders."

They rode about almost till noon, when the old man stopped with a grunt.

"Bless my soul," he growled, "I guess we have to give it up. Old Satan himself must have carried those mules to the place where all mules ought to go!

"I have heard of men losing wagons and teams on the prairie but I always thought they were city fellows who couldn't follow a trail or were too blasted scared to look around, but this beats me. Losing a ten-mule team in broad daylight! It's too much for my old head, and I thought I knew these prairies some.

"Well, let's trot it back to camp, boys, and let the devil keep the mules! It means $3000 off our profits, but we'll be all right, if we can only bring the rest of the outfit safe to Santa Fé."

The men were overjoyed to see their leader return, for they had begun to fear that some accident had befallen him and his companions.

"Boys," he told them, "that wagon is gone, lost for good. I can't understand it,

but I reckon we have done our best to find it, and we can't hunt for it any longer. We just have to let the small thing go to save the big."

Philip and Ted were curious about the big holes in the prairie which had given the name to this camp.

"Who made those big holes?" asked Ted, "and what were they for?"

Burley told them that some traders had made them about ten years before. They had started too late in the season, and winter overtook them when they came to this place. Nearly all their animals died from cold and hunger, so they hid their goods in these holes, and in spring they traveled on foot to the Taos Valley in Mexico, where they bought mules to transport their merchandise.

"Didn't the Indians find their caches?" Ted wondered. "I thought they noticed every little change or track on the ground."

"No, the Indians never found these caches, for the men knew how to make a cache. They made the pits in the shape of big jugs and

lined the inside with grass and brush to keep the goods dry.

"But the most important thing was to conceal all traces of the caches from the Indians. So they carefully scattered the dirt dug out, and some of it they threw into the river. When the goods were all in place, they covered the small opening with brush and strong poles, and then they replaced the sod so carefully that not even an Indian could tell that the wild prairie had ever been disturbed."

"How could they hide their big wagons?" the boy wanted to know.

"In those early days the traders had no wagons, they used only pack mules."

Before the men rolled up in their blankets, the wagon-master told them that to-morrow they were likely to have a hard day. The day's journey would not be long, but they would cross the Arkansas and would then be ready for the long waterless stretch to the Cimarron.

"And now one last caution," he concluded. "Don't any of you stray off after buffalo or

antelope. If a big ten-mule team can vanish on this endless, wild prairie, we surely can never find any lost men.

"Another thing. We have not seen any Indians for several days, but that doesn't mean that they may not be watching us this very moment.

"It is my duty to take this train to Santa Fé and bring you all safe home. If any man gets lost or falls into the hands of the Indians, he will have to save himself or perish. The rest of us could not do a thing for him. For we could not, with a dozen men, start chasing ten thousand Indians, who roam over half the continent. We are passing out of the range of the Pawnees, but on the other side of the Arkansas we strike the country of the Comanches, who are in a bad mood on account of the treatment they have received by the Texans."

CHAPTER XII

CROSSING THE ARKANSAS

OLD SHAWNEE PETE and his helper took great pains to have the whole herd drink plenty of water before he returned them to the corral next morning, for he knew only too well that no driver could control thirst-famished animals in crossing a stream.

Moreover, crossing the Arkansas was not like crossing one of the numerous creeks on the trail. The Arkansas was a real river, running with a strong current over ever-shifting quicksands. The river was deep from the snow water that was coming down from the mountains and also on account of the rainy season that had just passed over the plains.

Some of the men thought the train should wait till the river had subsided some, but the

wagon-boss was impatient at any further delay.

In the bunch of loose cattle there was a very large ox called Big Bill. His size and his horns gave him the looks of a formidable beast, but Big Bill was as gentle in disposition as a lamb and as calm as a philosopher. He had been over the trail several times and knew every crossing; but had never been known to join a stampede. If the water in a stream was too deep for wading, he calmly swam across, as if swimming rivers was the ordinary business of an ox. And as for the treacherous quicksands, which always threw the mules into a panic and made even many of the oxen nervous, Bill didn't mind them at all. His broad feet and long legs always seemed to touch solid bottom. In particularly bad stretches he just walked along briskly so as not to give himself time to sink in.

Big Bill was easily the boss of the herd, but only when a fresh young steer jostled him too roughly did he make use of his im-

mense strength to push the offender aside, but unprovoked, he never molested ox or mule.

"Drive up the loose stock!" called the Captain when the train had halted on the river bank.

When the stock came up with old Bill in the rear, the Captain slapped the big ox on the withers: "Old boy," he said, "you carry me over."

"What's the old man up to now?" several of the men asked each other, as the Captain swung himself on the back of Big Bill, who seemed to know exactly what was wanted and walked slowly into the river.

"Drive the loose stock in after me," Harley called back, "and then wait till I come back!"

Lined up on the water's edge, the men watched the Captain ride calmly into the broad river, with nothing but a willow switch to guide his mount.

It would have been amusing to hear the comments of the men.

"Well, I'll be this and I'll be that!" came

from all sides. "I'll be scalped if Old Bill isn't as wise as Old Doc. Look at him wading up to his neck!"

"Ah, Mex, what are you giving us? Wading? Man, can't you see he is swimming? He's a regular navigator, Old Bill is."

When Big Bill reached a place where he really had to swim, Captain Harley in a rather undignified way slipped off Bill's back and took hold of his tail.

The men shouted and yelled. "Go it, Bill! Go it, Doc! Hold on to the rope, Doc!"

But both Bill and Doc acted as if crossing deep, wide rivers was their special game, and the loose stock followed the leaders.

"I wouldn't cross that river for all the goods in the train," drawled one of the drivers.

"You are blamed right, Jack, you wouldn't," his friend assented. "It takes somebody with nerves and brains like Bill and the Old Man. Take it from me, Jack, Big Bill has got more sense than some men I know."

THE MEN WATCHED THE CAPTAIN RIDE CALMLY INTO THE BROAD RIVER, WITH NOTHING BUT A WILLOW SWITCH TO GUIDE THE MOUNT.—*Page 133.*

And again there was alternate silence and shouts and laughter as Bill walked and waded and swam, first across the broad main channel, and then across several narrower side-channels.

"Well, I think we can make it," announced the Captain on his return.

"Unhitch the mules and drive them across. Then hitch twelve yokes of oxen to each wagon and come along. Bill and I will pilot you. You men will have to get into the wagons, for there are several short stretches where the cattle have to swim. Use the whips a little and don't let them slow up in the quicksand."

Much to the surprise of Philip and Ted and the men who were new in handling cattle, the oxen did not hesitate to take the river.

"Gosh, Philip," said Ted, "I believe they know that they can go through if Big Bill goes through."

Ted was afraid to ride his pony across on account of the quicksand, so they threw the reins over the backs of the ponies and drove

them across with the mules while the boys rode across in one of the wagons.

Big Bill and the Captain had picked out the best ford and to the surprise of the men all the wagons crossed without serious trouble. Although the oxen had to swim in several places, there were always enough yokes that had a solid footing to pull the big wagons right along.

Only the mules proved true to their reputation as poor waders, for several of them became mired in the quicksand on the south bank and had to be pulled out by a chain around their necks.

"Bill, old boy," the Captain addressed the quietly grazing old ox, "when you get too old for the trail you shall live in my pasture at home as long as you care to eat grass on this earth."

Then turning to Burley he remarked: "Jim, I would have been afraid to cross without Old Bill's help. The river does seem all-fired scary when you look at it.

"Well done, men!" he called to the drivers, when the last mule had been dragged out.

"We'll camp right over there in that level spot. Get a good rest and a long sleep, for to-morrow evening we start on the long pull for the Cimarron."

CHAPTER XIII

THE LONG DRY ROUTE

THE men were impatient to be off in the morning, although they knew well that at this camp they had to change their usual order of march.

If they started in the morning they would be two days and a night on the long dry stretch. Exposing the stock twice to the heat and dry wind of midday without water would have been fatal to many of the animals. In order to make it possible for the oxen and mules to travel thirty-six hours without water in the hot and dry air, the trains always left the Arkansas in the afternoon and traveled two nights and a day, making use of the cooler hours of the night when the animals suffered much less for want of water.

The boys felt by this time that they were

indeed a long, long way from home. It was about six weeks since they had bade good-by to their mother and Uncle Jethro, but the time seemed very much longer. They were in fine health and thoroughly hardened to the rough life on the trail. To sleep on the hard ground after being in the saddle all day was no longer a hardship, and Ted was getting along finely on two meals a day, for which he always had a keen appetite. The only thing that marred their happiness was the fact that they had learned so little news of their father. No friendly Indians had come into camp who might have brought some news, and they had met no train or wagons from Santa Fé. The great prairie world seemed an endless solitude except for the wild animals and lurking savage Indians.

About three in the afternoon the herders brought in the stock and the Captain gave the order to hitch up.

For miles and miles the train struggled through that strange belt of sand-dunes where the heavy wheels sank in so deep that

the draft animals had to use all their power to pull the loads.

The sand-hills extend for hundreds of miles along the south side of the Arkansas. In most places they are only about three miles wide, but opposite the Cimarron Crossing they extend almost the whole distance from the Arkansas valley to the Cimarron.

Many of the smaller streams of western Kansas never reach the Arkansas. Although they start as vigorous, lively creeks, they finally spread out and just sink away in the sands and gravel of the prairie. On the south side of the Arkansas Beaver Creek, a very considerable stream, fades away among the sand-hills near a place known as the Lost Well.

The boys had had plenty of time to explore the sand-dunes which had for so many miles followed the green valley of the river like snowdrifts. And as if they were made of snow, the wind, which had blown the sand up from the river bed, kept ever and ever changing and carving the dunes into a fantastic

confusion of ridges, mounds and hillocks, now burying, now resurrecting the few grasses and bushes which were bravely trying to bind the loose sand together and cover it with a sward of green.

No birds and no game were to be seen, but a few large vicious rattlesnakes they found basking in the sun.

"I suppose he's boiling his poison," commented Burley when they came upon a big fellow.

"Why don't you shoot him?" asked Ted.

"Can't spare the powder," Burley laughed. "We may need it worse for Indians."

Beyond the sand-dunes there was not a bush or tree to be seen anywhere, and the boys felt a sense of homesickness and of awe creep over them, as one feels when for the first time he sails out of sight of land. Up to this time they had crossed many wooded creeks. Much of the time the Arkansas River with its scattered groves and the fantastic ridge of the sandhills had been in

view and had given the eyes of the travelers something to rest on.

But now the open, unbroken prairie spread out before them; vast, boundless, until far, far away, both trail and plain touched the sky-line.

For mile after mile the train wound along. Bands of antelopes stood in the distance gazing at the strange spectacle. The comical inhabitants of the prairie-dog villages, that were eating their evening meal of grass, stopped long enough to gaze and chatter at the intruders of their solitude. The odd burrowing owl, which Ted had at first mistaken for a meadow-lark, rolled its weird greeting, and a few ugly rattlesnakes, which like the owls have forced their company upon the little dog people, still lay coiled up on the warm mounds.

The boys wondered where the prairie-dogs found water, when their villages were located many miles from any stream. Burley did not know.

"Perhaps," he thought, "they dig wells

down to ground water, or they lick the dew or, may be, they do not need to drink like men and cattle."

An hour later the sun had sunk into the prairie. The mounds in the prairie-dog villages lay deserted; for the funny little animals had gone to sleep in their burrows; and the few gray owls which seemed to be standing on guard, increased the impression of solitude and loneliness of the plains.

For the men and animals in the train there would be no sleep to-night. They must push on, push on, to reach water, or oxen and mules would perish with thirst.

The stars came out and the hot south wind of the afternoon gave place to a delightful coolness, while packs of coyotes and gray wolves yapped and howled far and near.

The wagon-master, who had been riding ahead of the train came galloping back and told the drivers to bring up the rear teams.

"These gray wolves," he said, "generally mean buffaloes, and buffaloes may mean Indians."

About midnight the wagon-master ordered a halt. The cooks quickly emptied their sacks of buffalo chips which the men had been picking up in the afternoon. In a very short time coffee-pots were boiling and groups of men gathered around small glowing fires for a light midnight meal.

The mules and oxen had not been unhitched, and within an hour the train was again following the dim trail southwestward towards the Cimarron.

The men had hoped that the next day might be cloudy, but the sun rose on a clear sky, for cloudy days in summer are rare on the plains.

The train did not stop for rest or breakfast, because they could not lose any time out of the cool hours of the morning. As the sun rose higher, the hot drying wind from the southwest sprang up again, causing both men and beast to suffer with thirst and fatigue.

At the approach of noon, some of the animals began to pant and show signs of exhaustion, but with calls and whip the

drivers urged them on, for the distance to the Cimarron had not been half covered.

Early in the afternoon the train halted and there was another light meal and coffee for the men, but for the animals there was nothing but a short rest. Some stood panting with dull eyes and lowered heads against the winds; all were too thirsty to graze and some lay down utterly exhausted.

The men could refresh themselves from water-casks they had filled at the river, but for the animals it was impossible to carry water.

"Don't eat too much," Burley cautioned the boys. "A man does not travel well on a full stomach. The hardest stretch of twelve hours is still ahead of us."

After the exhausted cattle and mules had been replaced by others, the caravan again took the trail.

"Don't let any of the loose stock lie down," Captain Harley warned the boys. "If they once get stiff you can't get them up again. Keep them going with the train."

For the second time the sun disappeared and the stars came out, bringing some relief to the tortured animals. Coyotes and wolves again made their dismal music, which together with the bleached bones of cattle and mules passed again and again, served as grim warnings of the fate of man and beast falling sick or exhausted on the trail.

Sheer endless was the distance, and interminably the hours dragged and dragged. The men plodded along half-dazed with a wabbling gait, for it was the second night that they had not closed an eye for sleep.

"Ted, are you getting sleepy?" asked Burley, who with the two boys was bringing up the loose stock; but Ted did not answer.

"Ted, wake up! Pinch yourself!" called Philip. "You'll fall off and the coyotes will chaw you up."

"Yes, all right, Phil," Ted answered in a startled manner. "I guess I'll get off and walk a while with Old Bill. I'll take hold of his horn."

Soon after midnight the train began to

straggle out, until the first team was more than a mile ahead of the last one.

The wagon-master rode up to the first team; "Jack," he called to the driver, "what are you driving so fast for? You have the train strung out for two miles!"

"Captain," returned Jack. "I'm not driving at all. My whip is on the wagon. The oxen are smelling the water, and we must be within five or six miles of the Cimarron."

"I guess you are right," Harley replied, "but you had better stop a while. I don't like to have the teams string out so much!"

About three in the morning Jack called back: "Wa-ter, wa-ter!" and the cry was quickly passed along the whole line.

It would have been impossible to cross the stream with the famished animals, so camp was made on the near bank. As quickly as possible the drivers unhitched the frantic oxen and mules, which ran madly into the river. The drivers of the last two wagons lost control of their oxen and the thirst-tortured animals rushed madly into the

Cimarron, wagon and all, but as the river was shallow no damage was done.

It was but a short time before the cooks called, "Breakfast!" However, most of the men, including Ted and Philip, as soon as camp was reached, had rolled up in their blankets and crept under their buffalo robes, craving rest and sleep much more than food.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COMANCHE SURPRISE

THE long "Roll out, roll out!" did not sound at the Cimarron Camp at sunrise, because nobody except Shawnee Pete and Fleming who had slept on the journey, opened an eye till noon.

Shawnee Pete turned the cattle downstream where the best grass seemed to be, and Fleming with his gun on his shoulder, strolled slowly around the camp, for he was the only man on guard duty till noon.

By noon the whole camp was astir. There were no vacant places at the several messfires, and the men made up for the breakfast they had missed.

"Phil, I'm so starved," said Ted. "I think I could eat a whole buffalo calf."

"Eat all you want, but take your time for

it, Sonny," Burley told him. "We do not leave this camp till to-morrow, so you can lie around all day unless you prefer to run down an antelope."

"Not I," Ted assured his friend. "I'm still tired, and Blackie needs a rest more than I do. His feet are getting so sore that I shall have to make moccasins for him pretty soon."

At daylight next morning it was found that ten mules, including a big gray ox, known as, the roamer, were missing.

"Pete, what have you been doing again?" exclaimed the Captain. "Where are these mules?"

But Pete assured the Captain that he had kept the herd well rounded up all night and that he remembered now that he had not seen the roamer since the day-herders had turned the stock over to him.

Whoever was to blame, the mules were gone and an effort had to be made to recover them.

"Eat your breakfast, men!" Harley

ordered. "In the meantime Philip and I will look for them up-stream. Jim, you and Ted look for them down-stream."

Burley and Ted started at a brisk gallop down the Cimarron and had soon vanished around a bend in the valley. They rode as far as the stock had grazed, but saw no sign of mules.

"Here," called Ted, "are tracks going down-stream. That's where they have gone!" and both men rode quickly forward anxious to overtake the strayed stock as soon as possible.

Not a living thing was in sight. To their right and left lines of steep rock walls, almost bare, marked the Cimarron Valley, which in this region is about two miles wide.

Every river has its own face and character, so to speak, and in its bare and rocky bluffs the Cimarron differs from every other river in the world.

"We ought to see the beasts behind the next bend of rocks," Burley just remarked, when suddenly, without the slightest warn-

ing, half a dozen Indians sprang up behind some bushes and tall grass. Two of them snatched the guns of the horsemen, some seized the bridles of the horses, and before the riders realized what had happened, they were pulled off their horses, helpless captives.

Ted was speechless with fright, but Burley calmly called to him: "Make a bold face, boy! Make them think you like it! We're caught!"

A big Indian raised his tomahawk over Burley: "Texas?" he asked. "No," answered the white man boldly, "American! Missouri, Independence!"

"Comanche?" asked Burley, who understood a little of that language because it was the trade language of the Plains Indians.

"Yes, Comanche!" replied the leader. "Look for Texas. Scalp him all!"

After this brief talk the leader had a consultation with his men, after which two of the Indians mounted the ponies and made Burley and Ted walk between them.

In this way they traveled several miles down the river, when they came upon about twenty Indians with their ponies and the missing mules of the traders, concealed behind some low trees. Some members of this war party had stolen the mules without the herders becoming aware of it. The leader had then sent out scouts to spy out the strength, and probable wealth of the caravan. To their own surprise they had caught two of the men of the caravan and had brought them in without doing any more scouting.

There was the wildest joy when the two captives came in. The Indians yelled, swung their tomahawks and asked in a ferocious manner: "Texas, Texas?"

To these apparently murderous inquiries Burley calmly replied in the Indian sign language by making the sign of a crawling snake, which to all the plains tribes meant "Comanche." At the same time Burley pulled a small plug of tobacco out of his pocket and handed it to the war chief.

The compliment Burley had paid them by calling himself a Comanche, and the gift of tobacco to their chief put the Indians in good humor and they apparently gave up the plan of killing their captives at once.

They now consulted as to whether they should rob the train of the Americans. Burley knew that at this time the Comanches were not acquainted with the power of American firearms, but he also knew that these wild, desperate horsemen might harass the train for days and probably kill a number of the men, so he quickly decided on a bold plan to thwart their design.

He told them by such words as he knew and by signs that the American captain and his men were very brave and had such deadly guns that many Comanches would be killed. To substantiate his statements, he suggested that his little son should fire his gun at a stump.

"My little son," he added, "cannot shoot like a man, but we shall see what he can do."

"That stump?" asked Ted, who had by

this time gotten over his fright; "I can hit that with my eyes closed."

The Comanches at once agreed to this plan and a number of them shot their arrows at the stump, but all of them fell short of the mark.

"Step back about ten yards," Burley told Ted, "before you fire."

Ted took a quick aim, there was a sharp crack, and the splinters flew right and left from the stump.

The Comanches, like a crowd of schoolboys, ran over to examine Ted's target, and were much surprised at the big hole the bullet had torn clear through the stump. But their respect for the American gun grew still more, when one of them found the bullet deeply embedded in a green cottonwood some ten yards behind the stump.

"My little son," Burley repeated as if to offer an excuse for Ted's shooting, "is not a good marksman, but the American captain and his men are dead shots and their guns are very big."

The Comanches now said no more about attacking the American train, but they wanted Burley to show how he could shoot. However, Burley told them that he and his son had but little ammunition, that they wished to use it to shoot buffalo and antelope near the big camp of his Comanche friends on the Canadian River to the south.

At this statement the Indians at first looked at each other in silence. Then the chief said: "The white Comanche is a medicine man. His spirit can see farther than his eyes. We must not harm him and his young son."

CHAPTER XV

A TROUBLED WAGON-MASTER

CAPTAIN HARLEY, who was a good tracker, soon found that the lost mules had not gone up-stream. He and Philip on their return sat down quietly to breakfast with the men, expecting every moment to see Burley and Ted come around a bend in the river valley. When two hours had passed, both the Captain and Philip could suppress their anxiety no longer.

Harley told his men frankly that he feared something had happened to Burley and Ted, and that he and Philip would go after them. He ordered the men to keep the stock in the corral until his return, and placed one of the older drivers in command.

It did not take the two men long to find the trail of Burley and Ted. When they came to the spot, where the Indians had

sprung upon the two men, Harley at once saw from the trampled condition of the grass that something had happened at that spot, so both he and Philip dismounted to examine the place. At first they stood still a few minutes, sharply looking over the place without disturbing a blade or stick.

"Great Heavens!" murmured Harley. "Phil, there were four or five Indians concealed here."

"Are you sure that they were not deer or antelope?" asked Philip.

"Absolutely sure," asserted Harley. "There is not a hair or fresh sign of an animal on the spot. The beds in the grass were made by Indians.

"Now look for signs of a fight, but keep your hand on your gun. We may stop an arrow any moment."

Both looked the whole place over with the greatest care.

"Not a sign of struggle, not a drop of blood on the grass anywhere," whispered the Captain. "Think of Burley, the best Indian-

fighter in the train and one of the bravest men I ever knew, being taken without a fight! The red rascals surely worked the game of surprise to a finish."

The men remounted and followed the trail a little farther.

"We had better stick to our horses," advised Harley, "so we can make a race for camp if we run up against too many of them."

It was not long before they came to a place, where a small herd of ponies had stopped and turned back.

"There is the story!" Harley exclaimed under his breath. "A war-party of twenty-five or thirty Comanches. The men that captured Burley and Ted crawled ahead on foot, and the others with the horses and the stolen mules hid in the timber down yonder, and that is where they took Burley and Ted."

"Do you think they are still there?" asked Philip. "What in the world can we do?"

"Let us see," the Captain answered, ignoring Philip's last question. "They may still

be hiding in that timber waiting for more of us to walk into their trap. They may be planning to attack our train, but I think Burley, if he is still alive, will keep them from that by some kind of a ruse. He is the greatest man for quick thinking and acting in the face of great danger."

For a short time the speaker was silent.

"It is most probable," he began again, "that they lit out after they had brought in their captives. A bunch of mules and two captives without losing a man makes a nice little exploit to brag about.

"Let us see. It was about four hours ago that they trapped our two unlucky friends. By this time they are most likely twenty miles away down the Cimarron or across the prairie to their main camp. There will be heap powwow, feasting and dancing, and heap big talk.

"Confound the rogues! The government ought to send out enough soldiers to chase them all into the mountains or into Mexico.

"That one company of soldiers the gov-

ernment keeps at Fort Leavenworth can do nothing. To enforce law and order in this region enough men are needed to hunt down white and red criminals alike."

"But, Captain," said Philip, eagerly taking up again the question uppermost in his mind, "what can we do? What can I do to get Ted back?"

"Philip, my boy, you can't do a thing! Not a thing!" Harley answered with a faltering voice. "If I took half the men of the train, the others would be too weak to resist an attack. By to-morrow morning these thieves will have fifty or sixty miles the start of us. They will travel through the night, you see, but we can't trail them after dark.

"And then, Phil, it would not do a bit of good to follow them. The Comanches have two or three thousand warriors, and we would just be riding into the face of death, or into captivity.

"I have no choice, anyway. I must go on with the train, and you have no choice but to come with us."

"Captain, I can't do it! I can't do it!" Philip cried. "I promised Mother to look after my small brother, and I can't go back without him!"

"Be wise, Phil, and trust Ted to Burley. Jim will think out some kind of a ruse to save his and Ted's scalp. He got away from the Cheyennes several years ago. Some day he will give the Comanches the slip, and he will not come back without Ted. He lost a son about Ted's age and he loves Ted as if he were his own son."

But Philip would not be persuaded.

"No, Captain," he replied, "I can't. I must go where Ted is. I could never face my mother or father, if I did not.

"You must go back to the train, and I must follow the trail of the Comanches.

"If I ride hard, I may catch up with them before dark."

"No, you cannot go this way," Captain Harley objected decisively. "I shall not let you. You must come back to camp with me to get some food, your blankets, and plenty

of ammunition. You don't want to be helpless or starve on the prairie. You come and get those things, and then go, if you must."

The excitement in camp may be imagined, when the two men returned and told what had happened.

Philip packed up the few things he expected to need most, and the Captain gave orders for the train to hitch up and start as soon as possible.

"Captain," the men told him, "you are not going to leave the camp again. We were all getting terribly worried, and some of us were just going after you."

"Put some holes through them, Phil! We'll see you with a bunch of scalps in Santa Fé!" and other rough banter the men called out to Philip when, in a sad but determined mood, he headed his pony down the Cimarron to follow the trail of the Comanche warriors.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE TRAIL OF THE COMANCHES

PHILIP had not given up hope of overtaking the captors or his brother before dark, so he let the pony have the reins to go as fast as he wished.

The lad was not trying now to avoid capture and traveled without any attempt to conceal himself. When he approached the grove, where according to the correct surmise of Captain Harley, the Indians had taken their captives, he hoped that he might find them still there.

He rode up slowly thinking that according to the customs of the plains, he might be asked to stop at a distance to declare, whether he came as friend or foe.

However, there came no call. He stopped, and listened, his heart beating louder and faster. Perhaps they were waiting for him

in ambush and he would receive an arrow or a bullet. Turning these possibilities over in his mind, he rode cautiously through some low brush into the grove.

The place was deserted, showing signs of hasty departure. He rode carefully around the edge of the open place where the grass had been trampled down. It occurred to him with horror that the Indians might have killed their captives or left them for dead in the brush and tall grass. He called Ted's and Burley's names aloud. No answer came to his call, not even an echo returned from the wide and flat valley. It seemed to Philip that he had never been in a place so lonesome and uncanny.

He rode on, following the broad trail down the valley. The sun stood blazing hot over the river and plains, there was no stir of bird or beast, only the cottonwood leaves fluttered in the hot wind.

All afternoon the lad followed the trail. Every time he turned a bend in the valley, he expected to see the group of Comanche

warriors, and every time there spread out again before him the monotonous stretch of bare rocky walls, valley, and river. His horse began to sweat, and he led him to the river for a drink.

What was that? Again his heart seemed trying to jump into his throat. Half a mile down stream the Indians were just crossing the river. No, there were only ponies. The Indians must be driving them and were coming on behind. He urged his pony to a gallop, but slackened when he came close to the spot. Were his eyes deceiving him. The small herd of ponies were standing in the river, but what had become of the Indians? Were they hiding to shoot at him from ambush? Now a fine white stallion came out of the herd and neighed a greeting, or was it a challenge to Philip's pony, that answered the call, as if glad at meeting some of his own people; and Philip realized that the white stallion was the leader of a small herd of wild ponies and that he had not overtaken any Indians.

He was both glad and disappointed. It had flashed through his mind that he might fall into the hands of a Pawnee war party who would take him out of the Comanche country altogether, so he was glad that the ponies carried no Pawnee warriors.

He continued his journey down the river, but it was becoming more difficult to follow the trail, because herds of buffaloes and droves of wild horses had also crossed and followed this part of the river. However, he saw no game except two deer at which he did not fire for he carried enough dried buffalo meat to last him, as he thought, a day or two. He followed the trail until sunset, when it quickly grew too dark to travel.

Seeing that he would be compelled to make camp for the night, he took his pony to water and then staked him carefully on an open grassy spot, after which he built a fire under a tall cottonwood close by.

He felt very grateful that Captain Harley had made him take a supply of tea, sugar, coffee, and meat as well as a little flour, a

frying-pan, a tin cup, and a small kettle. He felt now both hungry and tired, for he had eaten almost nothing for breakfast, and the excitement and the strain of following the trail had greatly fatigued him and depressed his spirits. At a quick fire of dry sticks he baked a small cake and fried it in buffalo fat, and this with dried meat and a liberal draught of sweet tea revived his fagging strength and drooping spirits. The meal over, he replenished his lone camp fire with some larger pieces of wood and then sat leaning against the tree, thinking over the events of the day and making his plans for the morrow.

The silence of the night and the loneliness of his camp oppressed him. There was not even the doleful howling of wolves and coyotes, only the crackling of his fire, a low gurgling of the river against the roots of the tree, and the munching and occasional snorting of the pony. The absence of wolves and coyotes could only mean that there were no buffaloes or Indian camps for many miles around.

Very soon he began to feel drowsy. He laid down his saddle in place for a pillow and poured a kettleful of water on the red coals. Then he wrapped himself in his blanket and pulled the buffalo robe over his head, for the night air, as is usual on the plains, was growing chilly.

He was awakened by a distant rumbling and a loud snort of his pony. When he threw back the buffalo robe, it took him a second to realize that he was alone on the Cimarron. The night had grown intensely dark, a westerly wind had sprung up, and was bringing a shower down the river.

He remembered that his father had often warned him not to camp or stand under a low tree in a thunderstorm, so he picked up his saddle and bedding and groped his way to another place several rods away.

It was not long before the storm broke upon him. The rain came down in a pour and through a peephole under his robe he saw the brush and grass lit up by white flashes and flares of lightning, followed by

instant crashes and long rolls of thunder. Then there was a blinding light, immediately followed by a crash which shook the ground under him. He jumped out of his blankets and ran toward his pony. The animal was still there, but the cottonwood under which the lad had at first made his bed had been shattered, and lay across the ashes of his camp fire.

He crept back into his blankets, but they were wet and for the remainder of the night he squirmed this way and that way, trying to avoid the water-soaked parts of his hard bed.

CHAPTER XVII

WHERE WAS KIO?

WHEN he awoke after several hours of troubled sleep, his pony was gone.

What could have happened? Perhaps the animal was lying down in the brush? He anxiously looked over the ground, but found to his horror that he was not mistaken. The pin had pulled out and gone were lariat and pony.

How on earth did it happen? Did some Indian steal the horse while the rider was asleep? He remembered trying the pin and feeling satisfied that it would hold. But when he examined the ground around the pin he felt satisfied that no Indian had been near it. The heavy rain had softened the ground so much, that a little strain on the lariat had pulled the pin.

This was a calamity. Should he try to find

the horse, or should he follow the Indian trail on foot and let the cursed critter go? He had always felt a strong attachment for Kio, but he surely had trusted the beast too much. Where could the perverse brute have gone? Had he joined the wild ponies or had he struck out after his long-eared and long-horned friends in Captain Harley's train? If at this moment the pony had been where Philip wished him to be, he would have burnt to a crisp.

"Perhaps," thought Philip, "you can't trust these Indian ponies any more than you can trust the Indians. He is a Kiowa all right, and I'd like to break a few of his ribs. But getting mad doesn't help me. Where did the critter go? I have to get him; no use trying to foot it after the Comanches."

When Philip sat down to think, his anger soon cooled. After all he could not blame the pony so much, who was no more used to being staked out alone all night than his master was accustomed to camp alone. There was little doubt that he had taken the

back trail and was trying to rejoin the caravan. If one could only know when he broke away. Perhaps the rope or the pin might have caught on some brush and stopped the runaway.

This possibility encouraged Philip so much that he started at once on the back trail.

When he had gone only a few rods, he stopped.

"No," he said to himself, "this won't do. I'm a bigger fool than Kio. Being alone has rattled my head. I must take a bite to eat, and hide my stuff before I go. Indians might come along and take my bedding and saddle, and then I'd be in another mess. But I must take my gun and ammunition with me."

Philip had now regained his self-control. He would at first follow the trail slowly and if he did not overtake the pony or found him caught on some bush, he could increase his speed. In the meantime he would look for fresh tracks, so as to make sure that the animal had not gone off in some other direction or joined a band of wild horses.

An hour passed without the lad being sure that the pony had started back for the caravan. Then, at last, the trail led over a bare piece of ground where the tracks were plainly visible and showed that he had been going at a brisk walk. Philip increased his speed, for it was now only a question of how far the runaway might be ahead of him.

"If he kept on walking, or fell to grazing on the way," Philip reasoned, "I ought to come up with him pretty soon." Once Philip thought he saw the pony a quarter of a mile ahead, quietly grazing, but when he cautiously approached the bushes behind which the animal had disappeared, a big buck jumped up with a snort.

At noon Philip had reached the camp where he had left the train, and here the pony's tracks were very plain, but he had evidently concluded that he would have to hurry to catch up with his friends, for the tracks showed plainly that he had been following the caravan on a run, which Philip knew he was likely to keep up for miles.

The lad refreshed himself with a drink from the spring and threw some cold water over his face. He had an idea now where he would find that pony. He was strongly tempted to relieve himself of his gun by hiding it, but he had heard old plainsmen speak so often of the folly of a man leaving his gun that he decided to lug it along, although it was getting awfully heavy.

The plan of abandoning the pony altogether occurred to him again, but he rejected it, realizing that he might have to travel hundreds of miles before finding a Comanche camp.

From time to time Philip now traveled at a dog trot, still hoping that the pony might have become hungry and stopped to graze. About three hours later he passed the place where the train had camped the previous night. Here one of the oxen had died or had been killed for some reason, and coyotes were already picking the bones.

Kio had swerved off the trail, and Philip knew where he would find him, if he found

him at all. Some of the jackals of the plains came trotting toward him as if scenting some more fresh meat, but when the lone traveler fired a bullet over their heads the whole pack scattered over the plain.

The sun was getting low, when Philip saw something moving on the trail ahead of him. At first he thought it was a wolf, but when the creature stood out against the sky as it passed over a rise of ground he saw that it was Kio. When the lad reached the ridge himself he saw the caravan encamped a mile beyond.

When Philip reached the camp, Kio was hobnobbing with his mule friends and the men were standing around watching the performance.

"By Jove, Phil," Captain Harley greeted him with a twinkle in his eyes, "you're a queer traveler. What's the use of driving him to camp? Why didn't you ride him?"

"I guess," Philip answered rather sheepfacedly, "you know, Captain, why I didn't. The blasted critter gave me the slip."

CHAPTER XVIII

NO TRAIL AND NO WATER

THE men in camp joked a good deal about him and Kio having had a fall-out and each traveling by himself, but they nevertheless pressed him to stay overnight with them.

"You can't catch any Comanches in the dark," they said; "and you ought to give the good little pony a rest and a chance to talk things over with his friends."

Philip could do nothing else but take the banter good-naturedly. "He won't give me the slip again," was about all he could say in reply.

By this time a smell of coffee and frying bacon and meat filled the air; and Burley's cook called out:

"Come here, Phil, and have a decent meal

on me. I've heard that the Comanche girls are pretty bum cooks. Serve nothing but dog meat to a white man."

This invitation Philip accepted without delay, for he had eaten nothing since he left his own camp, and he had walked and run about thirty miles.

As the lad fell with a will upon the food and the hot coffee, the cook looked upon him with undisguised amusement.

"Tell you what, Phil," he commented, "you'll make a good Indian runner if you just keep in practice. Thirty miles a day isn't so bad for a beginner. If you just keep at it, you'll soon make a hundred miles a day."

"Well, Fatty," the lad replied, "I don't expect to keep it up. Old Kio won't fool me again; I've learned my lesson."

When the caravan started next morning, Philip once more struck out on the trail of the Comanches.

"I hope you will have better luck this time," said the Captain when he bade the lad

farewell. "And you had better take this bag of tobacco. You know tobacco is big medicine with all the Indians."

The lad was compelled to camp another night at the place where he had left his blankets and saddle, but before he lay down to sleep he tied Kio to a tree.

When he tried to take up the trail in the morning, his troubles began. The trail of the Comanches was now old, the rain had practically obliterated it, and buffaloes and wild horses had passed over the same ground. The lone horseman followed it a little way on the prairie south of the Cimarron and then lost it entirely. He rode back several times, but the result was always the same. The tracks disappeared amongst a maze of trails made on the hard prairie by buffaloes, wild horses, and antelopes.

Philip knew from a talk with Captain Harley that about twenty-five miles south of the Cimarron ran the North Fork of the Canadian River, while from thirty to fifty south of the latter he would strike the Can-

adian River itself. He had also learned from the Captain that the large buffalo herds were most likely to be found southwest of the place where he had camped, in the country now in western Oklahoma and northwestern Texas. The Indians would most likely be near the buffaloes, but there was no sure way of telling where either buffaloes or Indians might be found.

"You can always find Indians where you don't want to find them," Harley had concluded. "I should say they have a camp somewhere within two hundred miles up or down the Canadian River, so they can conveniently make raids into Texas or Mexico, or do a little friendly stealing and killing on the Santa Fé Trail."

When the lad realized that he had hopelessly lost the trail of the Comanches he decided to ride on in a southwesterly direction. From hour to hour he hoped to see some Indians, but the whole country seemed uninhabited by any human beings. A small band of antelopes eyed him with curiosity and came

so close that he could easily have killed some of them.

When evening came both the rider and his pony were so tired and thirsty that Philip was glad to make a lonely camp on an unknown stream which, however, he judged to be the North Fork of the Canadian.

In the morning he shot a wild turkey and ate part of it for his breakfast. When he had again started southwestward for the prairie, he came upon a flock of young quail, and a little way out of the timber several flocks of half-grown prairie chickens ran and fluttered across his track.

The day grew very hot, and the country had had much less rain than the region along the Arkansas. For hour after hour he rode without seeing a bush or a tree or a sign of life except prairie dogs, gophers and rattlesnakes. His tongue began to feel dry, and he began to look anxiously ahead for signs of water.

He passed many buffalo-wallows, but they were all dry. At last in the middle of the

afternoon when his tongue and lips felt parched and the heat had become unbearable, he thought he saw some buffaloes in the distance. He rode on eagerly, thinking the animals would not be far from water. In a little while he could see more of them, an immense herd; and great was his joy when he saw that they were standing in the water in a big river or rather in a lake. He had never heard of a lake in that region, but there it was before his own eyes. There was something strange about those buffaloes; they seemed to be two miles away and still they seemed immensely big, and the lake or river had also something strange about it. He was passing into a depression now and from the rise beyond he would, no doubt, be able to get a clearer view of the strange scene.

When he reached the crest of the ridge, he could hardly trust his eyes. The dry prairie stretched away to the horizon; water and buffaloes had vanished.

For a moment he was dumfounded; then the meaning of it all came to him. A mirage!

He had seen a mirage, a kind of air picture of buffaloes and water that might be a hundred miles away. He had heard old plainsmen tell of them, but had never before seen one.

Again he looked around for signs of water, but there was no tree or bush, not even the white sandbed of a dry stream, where he might have dug for water with his hands.

The country was not nearly so smooth as it appeared at a distance. The rider crossed many arroyos and small runs, but the pale bluish sage-brush and other desert plants told the lad that these depressions held no water except for a few hours after a rainstorm.

He continued his journey till dark and was thankful for the cooler air and the clouds that began to cover the sky, hoping that it might rain. Very soon it grew too dark to travel and he began to fear that the pony might turn around and take him back over the same route, so he stopped to make a dry camp.

He staked his pony with great care and

then built a fire of buffalo chips at which he roasted a little of the wild turkey. However, without water, he could not eat more than just a few bites. The pony, too, showed that he wanted water more than food, for he hardly nibbled at the dry grass around him.

Now Philip knew what it meant to make a "dry camp" or to get into a "water scrape" as the Santa Fé traders called it.

A few drops of rain did fall on the parched and cracked prairie, but only enough to torment still more the famished horse and man. The tired lad found only a much broken sleep, for several times a pack of coyotes, who seemed to sense that here were travelers in distress, came so near that the pony snorted and came close up to his master. A shot fired from Philip's pistol drove them off for a while, but very soon they returned, circling around horse and man as if expecting that both would soon fall an easy prey to them.

Philip had never known that a night could be so long. He sat up and tried to estimate the time of the night from the position of

the stars, which had come out again toward the north. He arose and walked around, chewing a spear of grass in a vain effort to allay his thirst.

With the first dawn of day, he was in the saddle going southwest as nearly as he could. He cared no longer whether he was on the trail of the Indians or not; for the present he had only one thought: Water! He must find water.

He tried to urge his pony into a more rapid pace, but the famished animal could go no faster than a walk for more than a short distance.

The sun rose on a sky from which every promise of rain had vanished. A brownish haze as of a fine dust of the desert hung above the plain and encircled the horizon.

As the sun rose higher the agony of man and beast grew. The pony walked along slowly with drooping head, and the lad began to feel faint and dazed. The much feared wind from the southwest sprang up, and to Philip's surprise it seemed to revive the

pony's spirits, for he began to walk more briskly and carried his head more erect.

Something began to stand out faintly at the horizon line ahead of the traveler. Philip had not heard of any such formation in that direction. He looked intently, trying to penetrate the brownish purple haze. Hills might mean water.

No, it was something better; broken cliffs with lines and clumps of trees. Trees mean water. The Canadian River must run near those trees.

Kio continued to walk along steadily and needed no longer any urging. He was smelling the water.

Gradually the trees became more distinct. When they disappeared while the rider crossed a depression, Philip was haunted by the fear that he might have seen another mirage, but on the ridge beyond they were again in plain sight, and Philip could not restrain a shout of joy.

About two hours after the indication of

water had first become visible, horse and rider plunged into the Canadian.

Then Philip staked his horse and stretched himself on the green grass in the shade, where he soon fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIX

WILL THEY STOP?

THE sun was already low in the west, when the lone sleeper was awakened by the neighing of his pony, who was sending a message to some wild horses that had just come to the river a few rods below.

Philip instinctively reached for his gun and crouched behind a tree, at the same time realizing that he had again done a most foolish thing. He had fallen asleep in broad daylight without taking the slightest precaution against being surprised. Captain Harley was right, Philip had acted like a babe on the plains. But by this time he also saw that luck had once more been kind to the careless boy by indulgently sending a band of wild ponies to wake him up.

As soon as he had made sure that there

were no Indians in the neighborhood, he started the ponies on a run down stream.

"Stretch out, stretch out!" he called as he flung up his hat and threw stones after them. "I can't expose Kio to your temptations," and the wild horses, with flying manes and tails made a dash for the open prairie and were soon out of sight and hearing.

Then he laughed at himself. "Here I am," he thought, "traveling around to find Indians, but I'm almighty afraid that they might find me."

On account of Kio's weakness for the company of his own kind, he rode a few miles up stream before he selected his camp for the night, because he was afraid that during the night Kio might try to follow the call of his wild kindred.

When Philip had first struck the river, he was famished with thirst and worn out with loss of sleep and fatigue. Now he felt ravenously hungry and also uncomfortable with a fine dust that had filled his hair and seemed to have crawled through all his clothing. So

while the water in his kettle was boiling, he took a quick plunge in the river and then sat down at his camp fire for a real meal, for he had eaten very little since the early morning on the previous day. He had become quite accustomed to eating only two meals a day, but on this occasion he had eaten only one meal in two days.

After supper he sat and watched the sun sink into the plain. Some owls began to screech and the whippoorwills opened their strange nocturnal concert. The stars came out and the moon spread an atmosphere of unreality over the gurgling river and the plains, while coyotes and gray wolves, some near and some far, set up their dismal wails and howls.

Philip was not yet hardened to the solitude of wild nature, like old trappers and plainsmen. The loneliness and weirdness weighed so on him that he almost wished that some Indians would come and capture him.

During the night his sleep was much broken. Several times the deep, loud howls

of the gray wolves came quite near, and the pony snorted and came close to his lone master as if for protection from the brutes. When Philip slept among the men of the Santa Fé Train, these common sounds of the plains did not awaken him; but now that he was alone he suddenly developed the wakefulness of wild animals, which seem to sleep, so to speak, with one eye open, always ready for flight or defense.

He was glad when, at last, the gray dawn of morning marked the beginning of another day. But what should he do now? He felt hopelessly lost and alone in the world. How could he ever hope to find his lost brother and Burley? With the country south of the Canadian River, he was entirely unacquainted. How far it was to the next river and what kind of country lay south of him he did not know. He wished again that some Indians might come. It would be better to be captured than to wander about in this endless solitude.

Perhaps Uncle Jethro was a wise man

after all. How happy life would be on their farm on the Missouri, if he could be there with Ted and his father and mother. If he ever got home he would never again be lost on these uninhabited plains.

But the rising sun and a good hot breakfast enabled him to shake off his despair. His courage and spirit revived, he would find Ted and Burley and together they would contrive some means of escape. Then, if only their father would return, Philip for his part, would not care what became of the silver the Indians had stolen. They might squander it, hammer it into ornaments, or cache it anywhere on this forsaken prairie.

He did not know which way to travel, he was only sure of one thing: he would not again strike out for the open plain, he would stick to the river until he found some Indians or till some Indians found him. All that day and the whole next day he rode carefully up stream ever on the lookout for signs of human beings. But he saw none. He did indeed come across some camps, but the signs

were old. He could not tell like Kit Carson and other famous plainsmen, just how old they were. They might be only a month or three old, or they might be a year old; but the men who left them were certainly not close by now.

So he turned his pony eastward determined to follow the river down till he found Indians or fresh signs of them.

His nervousness and his fear of the wild solitude had left him, and his inborn Saxon courage had asserted itself.

"No matter how scared you may feel, show them a bold front," Captain Harley had told him. "If you don't show fear, they will be afraid; but if you show fear, you are lost."

His sleep was light, but not on account of fear; he had acquired the watchfulness of the wild animals, of a man in the wilderness where laws and police did not reach, but where a man protected himself by the strength of his arm and keenness of his senses. He was well armed with rifle and pistol. He had plenty of ammunition, and

he knew how to use the keen blade of his hunting-knife. He knew that most of the Plains Indians of that time were armed only with spears and arrows, no mean weapons in their skillful hands, but vastly inferior to the best firearms in the hands of a courageous and determined white man.

He thought it all over. Of course he would be helpless against a big camp of them, against a hundred or a thousand, but against a small band of marauders or Indian desperadoes, he surely was not quite helpless, provided of course that he did not allow himself to be surprised or ambushed.

It was in this frame of mind that he rode down the rugged, beautiful valley of the Canadian day after day in search of a Comanche camp.

He felt no longer afraid and oppressed. He had a duty to perform and he meant to do it with all his heart and all his courage. There was no other way to do it. He really enjoyed now being on the watch all day long like a deer or a wolf. In the morning he felt

as much refreshed after his light broken sleep as if he had been lying in his safe bed at home.

He had been traveling down stream about a week when he met the great test of his courage and self-control.

As he crossed a ridge, he found himself suddenly in sight of a small Indian camp, consisting of one skin tepee, near which half a dozen ponies were staked.

His heart thumped and seemed to rise into his throat. He halted a moment to reconnoiter, then he rode slowly onward, but drew a little further away from the timber. He had not gone far, before he discovered several men lying on the grass near the tepee. They had seen him too, and were soon riding toward him at full speed. Philip knew that this was their custom in approaching strangers. He halted his horse and when the Indians were close enough to see his signals, he gave them the sign to stop.

He was now perfectly cool. Would they stop? He was determined that none of them

should lay hands on him. They did not stop.

Philip repeated his signal. He raised his right hand with the palm forward and moved it back and forth several times. They were close enough now to have seen the signal and he was sure they had understood it.

The Indians reduced their speed, but did not stop. Philip repeated the "halt" signal a third time, and then quickly threw up his rifle aiming it directly at the leader. This signal they understood and obeyed by coming to a sudden stop.

CHAPTER XX

DANGEROUS COMPANY

ALTHOUGH Philip felt that probably the Indians were Comanches, he nevertheless asked for the sign of their tribe. He raised his right hand and with the palm upright, waved it from right to left. This meant "I do not know you. Who are you?"

One of the Indians in reply made with his hand the sign of a creeping serpent, which to all the prairie tribes meant: Comanche.

Then Philip clasped both of his hands high in front of him. The Indian spokesman did not repeat the sign, but called out, "Texas?"

Philip knew what was in their mind. They thought he was a Texan and they were bitterly hostile to the Republic of Texas. So Philip shouted back: "No, American!"

The Indians consulted a little while before one of them repeated Philip's sign of clasping hands, which meant: "We are friendly," and at the same time the others motioned for him to approach.

Philip, however, had made up his mind not to allow them to approach, so he signaled them again to stop and move away; and when in spite of his signals they started toward him, he boldly aimed his gun at the foremost.

When his determined attitude again brought them to a halt, the white lad tried to make them understand that he was going to the large Comanche camp eastward downstream, and that he had a message for the chief. Then he signaled them to go back to their camp and not follow him.

He was not at all sure that they had understood his signs about the message, but he was sure that they understood that they were not to approach or follow him.

He felt strongly inclined to leave a present of tobacco for them on the ground, but feared

that this would only arouse their cupidity so he turned his horse more toward the open prairie and rode slowly away, for he held the worst suspicion about the character of his professed friends.

All six of them were young men. No women were visible about the camp, therefore they were not a hunting party. Their horses appeared thin and hard used, and one of the men had his arm bandaged. All these things made Philip conclude that they were a small war party returning from an unsuccessful raid against the Pawnees or some other tribe. Philip knew that a war party returning without scalps and having perhaps lost one or more of its own members, was the most dangerous band of Indians for a lone white man to meet.

He really longed to travel once more in human company, but he felt that in this company his life would not be safe a moment. The temptation to bring home the scalp, horse and equipment of a white man would be too strong for these savages, whose fame as war-

riors was evidently much in need of bolstering up.

The sun was just touching the prairie and within half an hour it would be dark.

Philip looked back from time to time to see what his would-be friends were doing. At first they seemed to be consulting and watching him, but when he was half way up a rise in the prairie, they started to follow. When Philip had reached the crest of the rise, he turned his horse and holding up his pistol in his left hand, pointed his rifle at them with his right hand. At this signal the Indians promptly stopped, and Philip turning around in the saddle rode slowly over the crest of the rise.

No sooner, however, felt he sure that he was out of their sight, than he urged his pony into a gallop and disappeared around a kind of a spur from the prairie, beyond which he dashed into some scattered timber in the river bottom where he felt the growing darkness of evening would hide him from pursuit.

For the present he felt that he had escaped from the treacherous band and the more he thought of it, the more he was convinced that they could not be trusted. He felt assured that during the night they could not follow his trail and that most likely they would not try it. But he felt just as sure that at daybreak they would start on his trail like a pack of hounds, and that they would employ all their wonderful endurance, their Indian wiles and cunning to overtake and surprise him.

He felt grateful that he had not fallen in with them on the first or second day of his lonely travels, before he had had time to adjust his mind and nerves to the loneliness and dangers of the wild plains.

Now he was perfectly cool and made his plans with a clear head. There would be no rest and no camp for him this night. The moon would soon rise and he would travel all night. He had taken pains not to overtax his horse, and the animal was in fine condition.

After he had covered about two miles, he

let Kio take a drink and also refreshed himself. Then he rode on again, eating his supper of dried buffalo meat in the saddle, while his pony slowly traveled eastward at the foot of the rugged bluffs between the prairie and the river bottom.

His thoughts ran back to the long night ride over the dry route between the Arkansas and the Cimarron. He let the pony pick his own way without urging him to any speed. He must keep him in condition to keep going all night and all next day. Hour after hour horse and rider wound their way in and out among clumps and groves of trees and around spurs of bold rocky bluffs, and Philip felt that the shadows of the night made horse and rider almost invisible.

The lad had become oppressed by the weird silent shadows and lights of the moon, when a piercing scream across the river made him instinctively grasp his gun and caused a shiver to creep up his spine. His first thought was "Comanche war-whoop!" but a moment's reflection told him that he had

heard the nocturnal scream of a panther, a call closely resembling the outcry of a human being in distress. A second time the oppressive silence was broken by the wild scream, and Philip, glad that the beast was not ahead on his path, thumped the pony into a more rapid pace.

He had not gone far before he realized once more that this region deserted by man was the realm of wild beasts. His pony suddenly stopped and while trembling and rearing with fright, refused to go forward. Something in the brush right ahead frightened the animal. Was it another panther or was it a lurking Indian? Philip grasped his pistol with his right hand, for the enemy was close by. Then some large black object with a blood-curdling "Whoof, whoof!" rushed out of the thicket, while the frightened horse almost threw his rider.

"Go on, go on, Kio." Philip patted the wildly excited horse. "Go on, we'll get out of this spookland," and he turned the animal toward the open prairie.

Philip felt now quite sure that by this time the Indians he had left behind had given up following him, so he believed that it would be quite safe to travel in the open. The wooded bottom was really getting too spooky for himself as well as for his pony.

On the prairie traveling was delightful. A gentle breeze was springing up from the east, and Philip felt sure that the pony would scent any danger ahead, so they would not suddenly come upon either bears or panthers, or Indians.

For an hour or more the lad rode silently over the moonlit plain. Then the pony began to sniff the air and even began to neigh so that Philip slapped him gently on the neck saying: "Keep still, Kio. You talk too much. Just march along and let me do the talking."

From the behavior of Kio Philip felt assured that there was no danger ahead. Perhaps Kio had smelled buffaloes or wild horses.

It was not long before the lad thought he could make out some black spots in the distance, and very soon he found himself in a herd of buffaloes, quietly grazing or lying down on the prairie like cows and oxen. The whole country seemed to be covered with them, but they were scattered in small bunches of fifty or a hundred. Philip reasoned that they had been to the river to drink late in the afternoon and that they were now resting and chewing the cud like domestic cattle.

He wound his way through the scattered bands and was careful not to disturb them, for if they should become aroused and start a stampede, he and Kio might have a hard time to keep out of the mad rush of thousands of frantic wild cattle.

There seemed no end to the herds, and Philip rode on and on, till he noticed that the pony was getting tired and judged that it must be past midnight. The lad himself also began to feel tired and hungry, so he

stopped for a rest and a meal in a clump of trees growing on a small creek flowing toward the Canadian.

While the pony was eating his fill of grass, his master built a small fire and was soon refreshed with a kettle of sweetened tea and dried meat. Thinking that the pony needed some more rest and food, Philip lay down for a short sleep, but before he did so, he put the saddle on Kio so he could be off quick if necessary. He felt quite sure that he would not oversleep, for since he had traveled alone he awoke frequently during the night. He could have gone without sleep, but he knew from experience how hard it is for a man to be really himself if he has gone entirely without sleep for a whole night.

When he awoke the stars were still shining, and Philip did not know whether he had slept an hour or two. The pony had eaten his fill of grass and brush and was lying flat on his side as sound asleep as a pony can be.

"Get up, lazy boy," Philip called as he

went went over to him. "We had better slip away before our Comanche friends shoo us out of this nest. Hope you didn't dream of bears and panthers, old boy."

Again the rider was on his way through buffalo herds, which spread over the prairie on the other side of the creek. Philip was glad that he had fallen in with the buffaloes. The Comanches would find it difficult to follow his trail through the buffaloes; moreover he felt almost sure that they would kill one or two and stop for a big feed. If they did that, he was safe; they would never overtake him.

It was almost noon when he came to the end of the herd. He had amused himself estimating the number he had seen. His count soon ran up to 5,000, then to 10,000, and he quit counting, when he had reached 20,000. A few days ago the prairie had seemed to be lifeless, now he had a feeling that it was a great wild cattle ranch covered with buffaloes, big bulls and cows and little brown calves, not thousands, but millions of them.

Captain Harley had claimed that the buffaloes would some day all be killed off. It seemed impossible. There must be hundreds if not thousands of such big herds spread over the Great Plains from Texas and Mexico far into Canada. Neither Indians nor whites could ever kill them all.

In the afternoon Philip scouted carefully over every rise in the prairie. He did not wish to ride into a trap and, if there was a large Indian camp on the river, he might expect signs of it almost any time.

Since he had left the buffaloes, the plains again appeared almost lifeless. One small band of antelopes and a few wolves and coyotes was all he had seen.

When the sun sank low on the horizon, he once more made camp under some trees on a small stream. He understood now that a big wagon with a dozen mules or oxen might absolutely disappear on these plains. It was a sheer endless and boundless world of prairie and streams, of valleys and ravines. Perhaps, he thought, he had made a

mistake by not allowing those Comanches to approach him. Maybe he might travel a month clear to the Mississippi or Missouri—he did not know which he would strike—without seeing a human being.

He staked his pony and before cooking supper he scouted on foot to the crest of the next rise.

When he looked cautiously over the ridge, something at once attracted his attention. He rose on his hands and peered hard ahead. It was no mistake. There was smoke rising in the river valley about two miles off. He lay down flat on the prairie, his ear on the ground. He did not realize how all his senses had become more alert and sharper during his days of lone travel. He could plainly hear some noise. What was it? Very soon he made it out.

It was the beating of Indian drums. He had found what he had been looking for. A big Indian camp was located only two miles away.

CHAPTER XXI

IN RED WOLF'S CAMP

PHILIP decided not to enter the Comanche camp before next morning. Whether he would find Ted and Burley in that camp, he had of course no means of knowing. He felt that he would probably be treated as a prisoner even if his life was spared. He had never been in a Comanche camp but was quite well acquainted with the customs of the Shawnees and other tribes who in those days were living near Independence.

He had some knowledge of the Indian sign language, and he had learned a few Comanche words, because Comanche was a kind of inter-tribal trade language. He hoped to have a little luck in his adventure, and he was determined to use his wits and put on a bold face, no matter what happened.

He would have preferred to ride into the camp at once and learn if Ted and Burley were there. But it would be almost dark by the time he could reach the place, and it would be much safer to go amongst the strange savages in the morning.

So he made himself as comfortable a camp as possible for the night, and hid a part of his ammunition in a hollow tree.

"There is no telling," he thought, "what need I may have of it. After I join the big camp, I may not be able to keep anything for myself."

He was careful to stake out his pony so that he could not be seen from the prairie around, and he did not make a fire for his supper and coffee until it was so dark that he felt sure that all the Comanche hunting-parties or scouts had returned to camp. He felt quite sure that he had thrown off the small war-party of a few days ago. He had crossed and followed so many tracts of buffaloes and wild horses, and had sometimes followed the windings of the river and at

other times cut across the prairie that they could not possibly have picked out his trail. Still he took the precaution to put out his small fire as soon as his bacon and coffee were done.

He awoke several times during the night and listened for signs of danger, but there came only the sounds to which he was well used by this time, the howling and yapping of coyotes and wolves and the screams and calls of a few night birds like owls and whip-poorwills.

In the morning he fixed himself up as well as he could and then rode straight into the Comanche camp. It was a big camp containing some two hundred skin tepees, and east of the camp he saw a herd of about a thousand ponies. His keen eyes picked out several animals that seemed unusually large for Indian ponies. They must be mules, the stolen mules of Captain Harley's train. His heart beat faster, when he made this discovery. If Captain Harley's mules were here, Ted and Burley ought to be here, too.

The sudden appearance of a lone white man in the Comanche camp caused at once a great stir. A pack of dogs yelped and jumped around him, small naked children tumbled hastily into the tepees, larger ones gathered around him, while crowds of men and women stared at him in wonder. What could it mean? No lone white man had ever ridden boldly into the camp of the Lords of the Plains.

Philip made signs to a young man that he had come to see the chief, and the young man led him to a large tent decorated with the head of a wolf in bright red paint.

The chief, a middle-aged man, came out, and Philip, who had dismounted, shook hands with him.

Philip did not know what to do next, but he felt that he must do something, so he told the chief that he had a message from his master and pulled out a paper Captain Harley had given him.

The chief told the people to go away and motioned to Philip to come into the tepee

with him, where he took the paper and looked it over with a grave mien.

"What does it say?" he asked as he handed it back to Philip.

"It says," Philip told him, "I have learned that one of my men and one of my boys live with you. I am glad they are with a great and good chief, who will treat them well. I send you some presents as much as my runner could carry on his long journey."

Philip thought the chief looked puzzled, but when the white lad gave him the tobacco, sugar, and coffee, he was evidently pleased.

In those days the Northern Comanches had very little intercourse with white men, and sugar and coffee were almost unknown luxuries.

After a period of silence, the chief asked, "Is it the Great Father of all the white men who sends this?"

Now Philip understood what puzzled the chief.

"No," he told him. "My brave chief of the Long Trail, who is taking a large train

of wagons to Santa Fé. He could not visit your camp because he must go to Santa Fé."

"Has he many soldiers with him?" asked the chief.

"No, he is a brave man and a friend of the Comanches, so he travels without soldiers. He is sorry that your young men stole some of his mules but he has enough mules and gee-haws to reach Santa Fé and wished you to keep the mules your young men took."

Philip could not tell whether the chief believed his message or not.

After sitting in silence for a while, the chief took a pinch of the brown sugar Philip had given him.

"Good, good!" he grunted. "We shall make a feast to-night!"

"Now," Philip thought, "is the right time to make my big request," and he tried hard to appear calm and bold.

"I must see the white man and the boy," he told the chief, "my master wishes me to tell them that they may stay with his friends, the Comanches."

There came a pause of painful silence. Were Burley and Ted in this camp? Philip had boldly assumed that they were. Would the chief acknowledge it, if they actually were in this camp?

He looked the chief straight in the face, but did not press him for an answer.

The chief took another pinch of sugar, and smacking his lips with delight at the taste of the rare luxury, invited Philip to take a pinch.

"Ugh," he grunted as he put the sugar aside. "Eat it to-night at big feast."

Philip began to wonder if the chief had forgotten his request about seeing the white man and the boy, but was afraid to repeat it.

The chief chewed a few of the roasted coffee beans and again muttered: "Good, good!"

Then when Philip was just about to remind him of his request, he said:

"The white man and the boy cannot come now. They are herding the ponies over

"I MUST SEE THE WHITE MAN AND THE BOY."—*Page 215.*

there. My young men shall bring them in to-night."

Philip wanted to embrace the old Comanche, throw up his arms and shout and dance like a boy whose team has just won a hard football game. But he set his teeth on his tongue, reached out his hand and said gravely:

"Thank you. I shall be glad to bring them greetings from my chief."

After a while the chief told a young man to take care of Philip's pony while he took the lad to a tepee in front of which a rather old woman was sitting. The chief spoke a few words to the squaw and then, after taking Philip into the tepee, motioned him to take the place opposite the opening, which was the seat of honor in an Indian tepee. Then the chief went away and Philip was left alone with his thoughts.

The events of the last few days passed through his mind like a dream. He could hardly believe that on the boundless world of

the great plains, he, a rather green plainsman, had actually struck the Indian camp, where Burley and Ted were living. The chief had treated him well. Could he really be trusted, or was he concealing some Indian treachery? Philip could not tell, he did not know the Comanche customs and the Comanche character well enough. He had largely followed the advice Captain Hurley had given him, and had done what the hour and the circumstances made necessary. He also wondered how much of Harley's message the chief had really understood. How much respect did he feel for a chief of trainmen, mules and gee-haws? Philip was much in doubt on this point. He knew that up to this time the Plains Indians had never felt the military strength of the United States, and that many of them thought the whites were no more numerous than one of the Indian tribes.

His thoughts were interrupted by the old squaw coming in with a kettle of fresh buffalo meat and hot broth. When Philip had eaten, the woman brought him a pair of

moccasins and motioned to him to take off his boots and put on the moccasins, a request he was glad to comply with.

Some curious people came to take a look at the white boy, but the old woman drove them away with angry words; while Philip, tired and almost worn out with the excitement and hard travel of a week, stretched himself on the buffalo-skins and soon fell asleep.

In the evening the chief sent for him to come to the feast. Some of the other chiefs were already there, more came in soon, and the last to come in were Burley and Ted. Had it not been for Burley's serious Indian-like face, Philip would have jumped up and given a yell that might have scared every Comanche out of the tepee.

But he caught himself in time and in a dignified manner, as became the messenger of a great wagon-master, gravely shook hands with Ted and Burley just as he had done with the Indians.

At first the pipe went around filled with

the tobacco Philip had brought. When Ted passed it on without taking a few whiffs, the Indians all laughed.

"Too little, too little," one of the Indians remarked. "Get heap sick. Keep no eat."

That remark seemed to have taken the stiffness, as we say, out of the party; and the scarred old braves began to thaw out.

Indians among themselves are really a social and jovial people, but are very sensitive to ridicule and always reserved in the presence of strangers.

After the pipe had gone around several times, a woman brought in a kettleful of coffee, which was poured into a few tin cups and passed around, everybody taking a few swallows. When Burley stirred some sugar into the coffee they were as delighted as schoolboys with an unlimited amount of ice-cream, for most of them had not tasted sugar for years.

There was plenty of food in camp and the women brought in kettles filled with the meat

of buffaloes, elk, deer, and antelope. Forks and knives there were none, every one helped himself with his fingers and drank as much hot broth as he liked.

Both Philip and Ted were surprised at the amount of meat which vanished. When the feasters seemed to be sated with the wild meat, the chief pointed to a piece of bacon Philip had brought. Philip at once arose, cut the bacon into slices and fried it in his pan over the tepee fire.

With this new dish every Indian seemed to grow hungry again and Philip fried and passed bacon till nothing but the rind was left. After the bacon was gone a squaw brought in another kettle of coffee, and when the feast ended about midnight, there was not an ounce of sugar, coffee, or bacon left in camp but every Indian had had the feast of his life; for it was an unheard-of thing for a Comanche to have all the sweet coffee and bacon he wanted.

"Great stunt of you to bring that grub!"

Burley hurriedly whispered to Philip as the strange party broke up. "We are safe, I think, for the present. But don't forget we are prisoners, all three of us. Don't say a word about your father and the silver."

CHAPTER XXII

CAPTIVE OR FREE?

WHEN Philip returned to his tepee that evening, two old Indians were already there, although there had been noisy feasts all over the big village. His gun and pistol had disappeared. Philip thought it would do no good to ask what had become of them, but when the old man noticed that Philip missed his weapons, he pointed in the direction of the chief's tepee and said: "Red Wolf."

Then Philip knew that Red Wolf the chief whom he had furnished the means to get up a swell Indian feast had sent for his weapons. "It's just for safe keeping," Philip said to himself, "the small white boy might get hurt playing with the guns."

If Philip had been in any doubt whether he was a captive or a free man he learned

the truth next morning. The old man, who with his squaw was not only Philip's attendant but his guard pointed to a kettle in front of the tepee.

"Eat," he said. "No leave big camp."

In front of the tepee two poles had been stuck in the ground and from the top of each hung a scalp. As Philip looked at them, wondering what they meant, the old man grunted: "He run away. Comanche catch him."

Philip knew that the scalps had been put up as a warning to him, and for the present he had no intentions of running away; but he started on a leisurely stroll through the camp, which had been made in some scattered timber near the river. The stroll was more interesting than pleasant, for a mob of dogs and children were soon at his heels. The hunters had evidently found plenty of buffaloes, for everywhere Philip saw plenty of fresh and dried buffalo meat.

The women were all busy. Some were scraping and smoking skins of deer and buffalo, others were making moccasins or hunt-

ing shirts or braiding long ropes out of rawhide, while others were taking care of their small children and gossiping and laughing.

A good many of the men were away hunting; and Philip could not help seeing how entirely these people depended on the buffaloes for almost everything they needed.

Most of the men in camp were doing nothing but smoke and bask in the sun, while a few were making bows and arrows, and one old man was making a pipe out of a piece of soft rock.

Philip was very desirous of learning whether Burley and Ted were herding the ponies every day, and where their tepee was. Apparently neither Burley nor Ted were in camp, nor did he learn what had become of his own pony and saddle.

When Philip returned to the tepee of Old Bear, the name of his keeper, he had taken a kind of census of the Comanche camp. He had counted more than two hundred tepees, all made of buffalo skins and many of them beautifully decorated with simple designs

and with the figures of many kinds of birds and animals.

"There must be a thousand Indians in this skin town," thought Philip as he stretched himself on the buffalo rug in Old Bear's tepee. "That means about two hundred warriors and hunters. Pretty slim chance for the three of us to get away. They would hunt us down like a pack of wolves run a deer. But wait till I see Burley."

For a few days Philip rather enjoyed the lazy life. It seemed good to have nothing to do but eat and sleep and poke around the camp. But after he was thoroughly rested from his hard journey, the white man's impatience and restlessness took possession of him.

"Confound this lazy life," he muttered one day as he lay kicking up his feet on the river bank. "Indians surely don't know any time. There's Old Bear! Just lies around all day. Has as much time as the river and the hills. He doesn't even talk. Why doesn't the old

fellow tell me where Burley and Ted are. He knows I want to know."

Some women came by carrying firewood to camp.

"Hang it all," Philip's thoughts ran on. "I should like to chop and carry some wood for the women. All my muscles are itching. But if I did, the whole skin town would laugh at me. That's the work of the squaws, and they would resent my butting in on their household affairs. A man must not do anything else but go on the warpath, hunt buffaloes, steal horses and mules, and lie around.

"Hang this life! I'm going to find out where Burley and Ted are and I am going to find something to do. Wouldn't Uncle Jethro laugh if he knew I was going to hunt for a job in a Comanche village?"

The next morning, when Old Bear was puffing his pipe in front of the tepee, Philip made his first attempt to draw the old warrior into conversation. After he had been sitting near him for a little while he asked

in a respectful way: "Ninahpuk, my father, where is the white man and his small boy?"

It seemed to please Old Bear that Philip called him father, and after he had drawn a few more puffs out of his pipe, he answered, "Watch Comanche ponies."

"My father," Philip began after a short silence, "I am young and strong. I came a long way and was very tired, but now I have eaten and slept much and I am no longer tired."

Philip had been very happy to find that his keeper spoke some English; but when Old Bear did not reply, Philip made another attempt.

"I have rested now," he said, "I should like to hunt buffalo or watch ponies."

"Go and see Red Wolf," his keeper replied now. "May be so, he say yes."

CHAPTER XXIII

DESPERATE PLANS

WHEN Philip saw Red Wolf, the old man was examining Philip's gun and pistol with much interest, and Philip keeping in mind the advice of Captain Harley, made the chief understand that he might keep both as a present.

If Philip had really been a free guest of the Comanches the chief would have made him some present in return, but now he only told him that he might go and watch the ponies with the white man and his small son.

It may be imagined how happy Philip was to have at last an opportunity to talk to Ted and Burley and learn everything that had happened to them, and to have something to do.

Philip was surprised that the three white men were left entirely to themselves herding the ponies.

"If we rode away as fast as we could," he asserted, "we might make twenty miles before anybody knew we had left."

Jim Burley just laughed at this idea of Philip's.

"Why, lad," he replied, "you don't know Indians very well. I advise you not to try it. If you think we are not watched, you still have much to learn about Indian ways. I am sure somebody is keeping an eye on us this very minute. If we tried to escape, fifty mounted men would pursue us in half an hour. Those two scalps you saw belonged once to two captive Mexican boys, who thought as you do. They were set to herding the ponies and they thought escape would be easy, but the Comanche scouts brought their scalps into camp before sunset on the day they had run away."

This was indeed crushing news to Philip, who had nursed the belief that if he had once

found Ted and Burley, they would all three make their escape in a few days.

"Where are the scouts that are watching us?" asked Philip. "Show them to me."

"I have never seen them," retorted Burley, "but I know we are watched; I feel it in my bones."

"Nobody watched me in the tepee and when I walked around in the village," argued Philip.

"Phil, don't be pig-headed," Burley came back, a little impatiently. "The whole camp was watching you, but they didn't think you would be fool enough to try to hoof it back home without arms or blankets, so they didn't tie you up.

"No use, lads, no use! Didn't you ever wish you could live with the Indians?"

Ted and Philip looked at each other without denying it.

"Well, boys, your wish has come true. Just play Comanche with all your heart! Get right into the game! The harder you play Indians, the better you're off.

"And I'll tell you this: If you ever hike off, I'll help to bring you back and see that you get whipped good and hard. So don't start any foolery."

A few days later as Burley and Philip were leisurely riding around the herd of nearly a thousand ponies, Burley said:

"Phil, ride along kind of carelessly and squint over to that grove of walnuts about half a mile east, but don't stop. I'll ride around the herd the other way."

"I didn't see anything but a couple of logs in the brush," Philip reported, when he met Burley again.

"Pretty good scouting," Burley laughed. "I saw one of those logs roll himself out of the sun and into the shade, a little while before I spoke to you. Do you believe now that they are watching us?"

After this the boys stopped talking of escape and just played Indian. They practiced roping the ponies, they had races and learned doing all kinds of tricks on horseback, they killed prairie-dogs with stones and

sticks, they took many a swim in the river and in the creeks, and when they had a chance, they played and wrestled and raced with the Comanche boys.

If they could only have had their guns and pistols, they would have been quite happy, but those the Indians had taken out after buffaloes and they had soon used up all the ammunition.

The boys wanted to ask the Indians for bows and arrows, but Burley would not allow it.

"They would at once be suspicious," he told them. "They are no longer watching us very closely, so let them alone. If we stay long enough they may invite us to go along hunting."

In this way the summer wore away and the days were getting much shorter. The boys had both lost count of the days, but Burley said it was about the middle of August.

About a week later some scouts reported that there was a big herd of buffaloes about ten miles east of camp, and the next day

nearly all the men went on a big buffalo hunt.

Burley and the boys were herding the ponies west of camp, and a little before sunset they slowly drove them over the ridge about two miles from camp.

All three riders were up on the ridge where they might be seen from camp. At this place it occurred to Burley that some of the ponies had strayed away among the trees up the river and he asked the boys to come along to look for them.

The boys thought nothing of this, because it was not an unusual occurrence. However, when Burley rode along slowly until it was getting dark, Ted became uneasy and asked:

"Mr. Burley, hadn't we better look for them in the morning. Old Bear will be angry, if Philip comes home so late."

Burley did not really answer Ted's question. He just said rather absent-mindedly, "We'll go a little farther to the next creek before we turn."

When they reached the creek Burley gave

his horse a drink and told the boys to let their horses drink. "And you had better take a long drink yourselves," he added. "This creek has mighty good water."

Then, when all three were in the saddle once more he spoke in a low voice:

"Now, boys! Hang all the Comanches! We've been their slaves long enough. May God help us to get away! To-night we beat it straight for Bent's Fort on the Arkansas."

The boys wanted to shout, but Burley gave them the sign of silence by putting his hand over his mouth.

"We'll march right along in the brush," he whispered, "as far as the ponies have grazed, then we'll strike out for the hard prairie! Good-by Comanches! Come along, boys! We'll keep going till daylight."

CHAPTER XXIV

A DARING VENTURE

SO, at last, the captives had broken away. It was a desperate venture, and all three of them realized the risk they were taking.

They had no arms of any kind, except their knives, no food, and no blankets, but Burley had brought with him flint and steel and a piece of dry punk.

"I wanted awfully bad to take three extra ponies," Burley told the boys. "The rascals owe us a dozen ponies for the mules and guns they have stolen from us, but I was afraid some scout would see us catch them and then the whole game would have been off."

"Jim, what would you have done if we had run into any of our friends before we got on the way?" Philip asked.

"That's easy!" Burley laughed. "We

weren't trying to run then. We were looking for ponies that had strayed away in the brush up the river. I should have said something strong about that bunch of stray ponies and returned to camp with our friends and waited for another chance.

"But it was time to make a break, for we must reach Bent's Fort before the Santa Fé trains return to the States."

The boys wondered if the Indians would try to follow them.

"You may be sure they will," Burley told them. "Buffalo-hunting gets very stale if it is your regular business year in and year out. A man-hunt will furnish the most welcome excitement to every lazy buck in camp."

"What will they do to us, if they catch us?" Philip asked.

"'Do to us'?" repeated Burley. "There'll be three dead men, Phil, and they'll have a howling scalp-dance for a whole night. They haven't had one since they caught the runaway Mexican pony-herders."

"Gee!" whispered Ted, "my hair has grown enough so that they could easily yank it off."

"We must not be caught, boys! That is our only salvation," Burley told them. "Let's go to it. The ponies can run a few miles now."

The night grew chilly, but the riders did not feel it. They were riding for their lives.

About midnight Ted grew sleepy, and several times Philip poked him saying: "Don't fall off, Ted, and break your bones. If you don't keep awake we'll have to tie you to the saddle."

When they crossed a small creek, they stopped a few minutes to let the horses drink and Burley advised the boys to dismount and rest their muscles a few minutes and to walk out on a log for a drink.

"But don't step on bare, soft ground," he warned them. "We must not leave any man-tracks at this creek. It is only about twenty miles from camp and the scouts may be here by noon."

Very soon they were in the saddle again and traveled without stopping till dawn, when they came upon a maze of deep buffalo-trails.

Burley stopped and looked around at the lay of the land. "Boys," he suggested, "I think we'll cross the river on these trails and go into camp on the south side."

A suitable place was soon found in low timber on a small creek between rugged banks, where no trail ran up the ravine.

"Now for some breakfast!" Burley laughed. "We stay in this hole till dark unless they drive us out."

The boys looked for fruit and berries on the trees and bushes, and they found great clusters of wild grapes. Burley wasted no time in that way, he looked for their breakfast in the creek.

"Here, boys," he called after a few minutes, "is a hole full of suckers and other fish. Now close the hole down-stream with brush, and then we'll each push a bundle of brush up the hole and drive them out on the riffles."

Much to the surprise of the lads the plan worked wonderfully, and fish enough for two meals were soon thrown out on the grass.

"Now clean them," Burley told the boys. "I will scout around a bit on the hills."

The fish were cleaned when Burley came back. "Build a fire, Philip," Burley requested. "I don't see any Reds, so let's have breakfast."

A person who has never tasted any other but home- and hotel-cooked meals might not have relished the fish, which Burley and the boys fried on green sticks over a bed of coals without salt, bacon, or butter.

Burley and the boys had become used to eat their meals without salt or any kind of seasoning, for in those days salt was seldom used by the Plains Indians, butter was unknown, and bacon was a rare luxury. The Indians, however, did not eat raw meat, unless necessity compelled them.

After breakfast Burley stood guard till noon, when Philip took his place for the rest of the day. Neither of the guards saw any

signs of Indians on either side of the river. At dark they again started in a general westerly direction on the south side of the river, after they had caught enough fish to supply them the next day. This proved a wise precaution, for their second camp was made in a brushy arroyo, where no food but disgusting snakes and lizards could have been secured.

Burley now began to hope that they had really outwitted the Comanches.

"I struck out west," he told the boys, "because I figured that they would naturally think we had either gone straight north to hit the Santa Fé Trail by the shortest route, or that we were traveling toward the Cimmaron Crossing. The only thing I am really afraid of now is that we fall in again with some small band of marauders. If we do, it is likely to be the end of us, unarmed as we are."

In the afternoon, while Ted was on guard, a new idea struck Burley, and he and Philip cut down three small, smooth cherry-trees.

To these war-clubs, as Philip called them, they affixed by means of rawhide thongs a kind of butt, and then they made the barrels shine like dark metal by rubbing fish-oil on them. When the war-clubs were ready, Philip sneaked up on Ted and called out, "Look here, Ted, see the gun I found in the brush."

"Gee!" exclaimed Ted, "it's a brand-new one! Don't you point it at me!"

"Wake up, Ted," laughed Philip, "I'm not pointing any gun at you. You're asleep on sentry duty. Come along! I'm the officer of the day and arrest you!"

"Phil, are you crazy, or am I? You're sure pointing that gun at me," exclaimed Ted, growing angry.

Not until Philip had approached within a few paces of him did Ted discover that he had been fooled by a fake gun.

"Here," said Philip, handing the wooden gun to his brother, "let me see how it looks in your hands."

Burley and Philip had done their work

thoroughly. Every knot and white spot on the wood had been smeared with mud and charcoal and then rubbed over with fish-oil, so that the resemblance to a real gun was quite deceiving.

"Well," mused Philip, standing off a dozen paces and looking at the armed sentry, "if the Indians have no better eyes than you and I, these wooden clubs may fool them. But I hope we won't have to try them."

As soon as it was dark, the three men left their camp. For several hours they traveled on the south side of the Canadian. When they came to the next buffalo ford, they crossed back to the north side and struck out in the direction of Fort William, a well-known trading-post on the upper Arkansas; which later became known as Bent's Fort. It was located in the present State of Colorado about a hundred miles west of the Kansas line and was built in 1828 by William Bent, his two brothers and Ceran St. Vrain.

For about twenty years Bent's Fort was the most important trading-post on the

plains; and for many years it was the first buildng west of Council Grove, a distance of about five hundred miles.

What the distance was from the Comanche camp to Bent's Fort, Burley did not know.

"I think it must be between two hundred and three hundred miles," he explained to the boys. "If our ponies don't play out or get sore feet, we ought to make forty or fifty miles a night and reach Bent's Fort in about a week."

Ted was worried how Burley could find the fort, if he had never been over the country through which they were traveling.

"Well, sonny, that's easy enough," explained Burley. "You see I have a sort of a big map of the country in my head. I know the Arkansas is the first large river we strike by going north or northwest. I have traveled along that river from Walnut Creek, near its great bend, clear to the mountains. I know that the fort lies east of the mountains, and I know the Arkansas River when I see it. You will know it, too.

All the other streams we have to cross are just creeks, and I'm afraid we shall find some of them bone-dry at this season."

"Do you think we can learn anything of Father at Bent's Fort?" asked Ted.

"That is just the place where we ought to find out about him. All the Indians of the plains trade there, and the white trappers and mountaineers also go there to sell their furs and buy their provisions.

"Boys, I shouldn't be much surprised if we find your father there."

"Won't the Indians get us there?" asked Ted wistfully.

"No, sonny," laughed Burley, "if we get into Billy Bent's fort you can make faces at all the Indians on the plains."

Burley's fear that many of the smaller creeks might be dry proved to be well-founded. The farther west they traveled, the drier the country became and the more it appeared deserted of all game.

The boys began to wonder what they would eat, when the fish were all consumed; but

Burley said he was not worried about securing enough food.

"Do you see that prairie-dog town?" he asked, pointing up a dry creek on which they had made their camp. "Run over and kill half a dozen of them with sticks or clubs. That will give us meat for another day. It's a poor plainsman who cannot find food on the prairie in summer; only you don't want to be too particular. It's a case of eating what you can get."

The lads looked a little squeamish when Burley roasted three of the animals over a fire of buffalo chips.

"Ugh," remarked Ted, "they look like cats. I can't eat them, even if I do feel half-starved."

"Never mind what they look like," observed Burley, as he began his meal; "they taste like chickens, and they live on grass and roots just like rabbits. If you fellows wish to fast a day, I'll eat your share, so it won't spoil on us."

The lads soon found that Burley was right.

"If somebody had not tagged a 'dog' to their name they would be excellent game. Just call them ground-rabbits and they'll taste fine," Burley told them while he was finishing his meal.

To find water at this camp was more difficult, but the ponies gave them a hint where it might be discovered by digging with their forefeet in a low place in the sandy bottom of the creek. The three men at once fell to digging with their hands and in a short time had dug a well, which furnished enough water for both horses and men.

The hardest part of the trip was sleeping without blankets or extra clothing and standing guard.

However, standing guard was absolutely necessary. Several times they saw parties of Indians at a distance, but the travelers were never discovered until one afternoon when according to Burley's reckoning they were camping within fifty miles of the Arkansas. At this place Ted saw four mounted Indians riding directly toward their

camp in a ravine; the Indians being evidently in search of water.

Ted gave the alarm, and Burley and Philip at once agreed that it was impossible to avoid discovery, so all three at once mounted and started north.

The Indians no sooner saw the three travelers than they started in pursuit at full speed. The white men did not dare to put their horses to the test at once for fear that they might give out; moreover, Burley said, if they showed fear, the Indians would dog their trail till they overtook them.

To the great relief of the white men the reds were armed only with spears and bows and arrows.

"Lads, we'll have to try the guns on them," Burley decided. "They'll run us down if we don't."

So they halted and Burley signaled the savages not to approach, but they paid no attention to his signal. Then Burley pointed his gun at them, and the savages slackened their speed.

"At them, fellows!" ordered Burley. "Act as if you could blow them to hell." And with these words the three rode forward a few paces, then stopped and boldly pointed their wooden guns.

That bold maneuver brought the Indians to a stop at a hundred yards.

"Who are you?" signaled Burley.

"Comanche," came the answer. "Who are you?"

"Hunters," Burley replied. "Don't come near!" and then he turned his horse and he and the boys rode slowly away.

When they crossed over a rise of ground, they saw some scattered timber near the head of a creek about a mile away and rode toward it at an easy gallop.

The Indians, who had been following them at a distance they thought safe, stopped when the white men entered the timber.

"Are they going to attack us?" asked Ted much excited.

"No, they will not come near. Our wooden guns did the trick."

For a while red and white man watched one another, then the Indians rode slowly away, believing the whites too well armed.

As soon as the Comanches were out of sight, the white travelers continued their journey and soon found that they were nearer the Arkansas than they had reckoned. About midnight they crossed the big river by taking hold of the tails of their horses as the animals swam the deep water in mid-stream.

The water was bitterly cold, and for several hours the three men trotted along beside their horses to keep themselves warm.

At dawn they could see the adobe walls and the bastions of the big fort. Just as the sun rose like a big red ball out of the prairie they knocked with their wooden guns at the gate of the fort, shivering, ragged, and exhausted, but jubilant of heart. They had escaped from the Comanches and crossed safely over three hundred miles of wild prairie with nothing but the sun and the stars to guide them, and with no arms but their knives and the pretended guns.

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE GREAT ADOBE FORT

NO sooner had they entered the fort, than the boys saw that from the bastions and through the port-holes of this stronghold they could indeed laugh at all the Indians on the plains. The walls of sun-dried brick were three feet in thickness, and Colonel William Bent, one of the owners, had a force of twenty-five well-armed and fearless men under him, while the two cannons in the bastions alone would have thrown the whole Comanche nation into a panic.

Captain Harley's train had not yet returned from Santa Fé, but it was known in the fort that three of his men had been captured or killed by Comanche raiders. But more welcome to the boys than anything else was the news Colonel Bent told them of their father. He had in some way escaped from

the Pawnees and had joined some trappers in the foothills and Colonel Bent felt sure that before winter set in he would come to the fort with them.

"I knew they wouldn't get Father, I knew they wouldn't get him," Ted exclaimed, wildly throwing up his arms and almost choking on a big mouthful of cornbread. "He'll come back or we'll go and find him. Can't we, Mr. Burley?"

"We need some rest and sleep," Burley tried to calm the excited boy, "after that we can talk about going to the mountains."

For several days Burley and the lads did nothing but eat and sleep; for the boys had been almost exhausted with cold, fatigue, and loss of sleep.

"I was mighty glad," Burley explained to Colonel Bent, "that we were nearer the river and the fort than I thought we were. Both the boys and the horses were beginning to play out, although the boys, especially the little fellow would not acknowledge that they were used up."

About going to the mountains in search of their father, the boys were disappointed. Burley would not listen to it. Colonel Bent also said it would be a hare-brained plan, and if the lads were in any hurry to get killed, they could stand up in front of his big cannon.

"A brave plainsman," he continued, "like Burley sometimes saves his hair out of a desperate scrape, but he does not go and ask the Indians to scalp him. Burley is right, you fellows stay right here. I don't know where your father is. He may be a hundred or three hundred miles from the fort. If he is alive, he will come in some day; for Indians and trappers for five hundred miles around come to this fort to trade. You were all-fired lucky that Burley brought you into the fort with nothing but wooden clubs. I won't sell you any guns. You stay here till your father comes in or till you go home with a train from Santa Fé."

Another talk with Burley convinced the boys that leaving the fort would be foolish,

and they submitted to the inevitable with as good grace as possible.

They worked in the fort, helped the men with the big buffalo-skin press, or went with them on short hunting-trips after deer and buffalo near the fort. There was plenty to do and to see. Indians came to the fort to trade and to be fed, and several parties of hunters and trappers of Colonel Bent came and went; but none brought any more news of Silas Benson.

Time wore on slowly for the boys. The month of September passed, the days grew short and the nights very cold; for Bent's Fort lay about eight thousand feet above sea level.

One morning early in October a small train of pack-animals was reported approaching the fort from the north. The boys with Burley and Colonel Bent at once climbed into one of the bastions, from which a good view could be gained.

"Are they Indians or white trappers?" the boys asked anxiously.

There were four horsemen and seven or eight pack-animals, mules, or horses.

When the train had approached within a mile, both Burley and Colonel Bent said: "They are white men. A party of trappers coming from the foothills or the mountains with a big haul. All their animals can carry, or they would not come in till spring."

"May we ride out to meet them?" asked the boys, and within a few minutes the boys galloped out of the gate, while Colonel Bent and Burley remained in the bastion.

There seemed to be some kind of commotion when the two parties met. The train stopped, but the two men in the tower could not see exactly what happened. There were some wild yells apparently coming from the whole party and then Ted seemed to tumble off his horse and began to dance and jump wildly around on the prairie. Then he yelled something toward the fort. Now he jumped on his horse again and raced like mad to the fort yelling at the top of his shrill voice, "He's come, he's come! Father's here!"

To tell how Benson had escaped from the Pawnees and how he had lived almost a year with the trappers in the mountains and the foothills would make too long a story. In his flight from his captors he had lost his horse, had himself been wounded, but had killed a pursuing Pawnee. His captors, he knew, would expect him to strike out for Bent's Fort, so he went almost in the opposite direction, struck boldly out for the mountains, knowing that on foot and weak from loss of blood he could not hope to reach Bent's Fort. He knew that several parties of white trappers were working west of the Pawnee camp, and he had followed the headwaters of the Republican River until he reached the camp of the men with whom he had now come to the fort. He had dropped exhausted upon reaching the trappers' camp, and these rough but withal chivalrous knights of the wilderness had nursed him back to life and health. After the things that had happened he did not dare to cross

the Pawnee country alone, for he knew that if the Indians captured him a second time, they would not give him an opportunity to escape.

About a week later Captain Harley's train drew into the fort, and that night there was a great feast and a dance, although there were only two white women and a few Indian women in the whole fort.

Burley's story of the wooden guns the men would not believe. "Burley," drawled Shawnee Pete, "you were always a devil of a fellow, all right. I'll admit that. But you are also the biggest liar I ever seen."

But when a minute later, Burley and the boys marched solemnly into the room with their fishy-smelling guns, a howl of delight went up from the men.

A mock court was at once convened and Shawnee Pete was with great solemnity condemned to be led out into the corral of the fort, there to be roasted alive by three savage-looking Cheyennes, who with a stolid

face, grunted their approval of the sentence of the court and their willingness to carry it into effect.

Ted had been breathlessly watching the trial. "Phil, are they going to burn him?" he asked, as two men led the prisoner away. But much to Ted's relief they did not lead him into the corral, but into the big dining-room where Shawnee Pete was allowed to pay in a manner agreeable to the court, the jury, and the spectators for insulting Truthful Jim.

When, after a day of rest and visiting, Captain Harley's train pulled out for Independence, Burley and the three Bensons joined the train. Silas Benson had made a good catch of fur, which he exchanged for guns, pistols, ammunition and sundry other goods packed in suitable boxes and bales.

"You could buy these goods much cheaper at Independence than I can sell them to you," Colonel Bent suggested.

"That is true, Colonel," Benson admitted, "but I expect to use them before I get there.

I'm not through with this trail and the all-blasted Pawnees. I saw three Pawnee thieves ride away with all I made by hard dangerous work in three years. The Comanches jumped the bunch of Pawnees before they could get away. Two fellows carrying the coin were overtaken and killed. Two others had me bound and tied to the horse. We got away. I think a third Pawnee also got away. The Comanches did not get my silver, or Burley and the boys would have seen indications of it. I know that the Pawnees haven't got it, or I should have noticed it.

"Where is it? Who has it? Have any Indians shown silver or gold chains in the fort?"

Colonel Bent had not seen any gold or silver with any of the Indians that had traded at his fort.

"Then where is it?" Benson repeated. "The stuff was in two bags weighing about a hundred pounds each, and about half of it was gold. Their ponies couldn't make time

with such loads, so they jumped off and chucked it, cached it somewhere in the woods on Pawnee Fork.

"Now you know why I bought a lot of artillery and a few,—well, a few mining-tools. But keep it dark, it's not a good story to pass around.

"Good-by, Colonel! and if you ever lose any boys or get into a tight fix, I'll do for Colonel Bent what he did for me and mine. So help me God!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A KNOTTY PROBLEM

CAPTAIN HARLEY'S caravan left Bent's Fort in high spirits. They had done well at Santa Fé. The trip had certainly not been monotonous, but their lost men had safely returned. The caravan was traveling light, and in spite of the short days was making good time. The weather was delightfully cool, so that neither men nor animals suffered from heat. Their route led down the Arkansas River as far as the Great Bend, so they knew that good grass and water would be plentiful.

Every evening there were great gatherings around the camp-fires; for the evenings were long now and the men had many stories to exchange. Benson's experiences amongst the Pawnees and the trappers would alone have filled a book.

Benson had arranged with the wagon-master to have the train camp at Pawnee Fork, whenever they should reach that creek.

Captain Harley was glad to spend a day with Burley and Benson looking over the scene of the Pawnee attack on Benson and his partner.

"Every plainsman is caught off his guard once," said Benson, relating the story of the hold-up. "This is the spot where Jack Fridley and I were caught napping. We had not seen an Indian or a white man since we left Bent's Fort. I proposed to travel over this dangerous stretch from Pawnee Fork, past Pawnee Rock and across the Walnut at night, when the red thieves are seldom about, but Jack was in a great hurry to get home, for he had not seen his wife and children in St. Louis for two years, so I let him have his way.

" 'You are clean bughouse on Indians,' he railed at me, laughing. 'Believe me, they are denned up like the gophers and prairie-

dogs. Moreover, not a soul knows we are going to pass here!

"'Don't tell me,' he laughed, 'that those two Pawnees who saw us at the fort would ride three hundred miles over a cold wintry prairie to tell the tribe that they might catch two white men and four mules.'

"'They wouldn't tell the tribe,' I argued with him; 'they would just get three or four rogues to join them, that would be plenty to make it hot for us.'

"Well, here is the spot. The mules were going at a walk. All at once they stopped. Five or six Indians just rose out of the brush. One stopped the mules, one fired at Fridley and pulled him off the wagon, and two men poked their guns into my face, before I saw there was any Indian on my side.

"Two men hustled Fridley off toward the river. Two others put me on a horse, tied my hands in front of me and tied my feet with a rope passed under the pony's belly.

"Fridley fired his pistol and I think killed or wounded one man. I never had a chance

even to grab my pistol and don't know what became of it.

"Well, all I can say is they got us right, found us napping like a couple of green kids. Phil and Ted couldn't have made a poorer showing. It makes me mad every time I think of it."

Benson was silent as if overcome anew with chagrin at having been trapped by Indians.

"I swear," he began again, "if I hadn't seen the Pawnees with my own eyes, I would have vowed the whole affair was a well-planned hold-up by white cut-throats. It wasn't done in the Indian way. It was too bold, absolutely reckless, and all over before you could say Jack Robinson. I believe to this day that the thing was planned by a white road-agent, but, if a white man had a hand in it, he was dressed and painted like an Indian. Oh, but give me a chance to draw a bead on some of my Pawnee friends!"

The three men went over to the copse where Burley and the boys had found the

bones and the piece of a coat. Benson gave one look at the piece of cloth.

"It's a piece of the coat," he spoke in a low voice now, "that Fridley wore on that last ride. The brutes murdered him right here."

"What did you do with your coin-bags?" asked Harley. "Show us where you saw them last."

"Two men took a bag each, and two others told me to come along with them. We all rode west along the south side of the creek. When we had gone a few rods, one of the men with the coin-bag called, 'Comanche!' I looked back and saw about a dozen Indians coming after us full tilt, and I saw three men with the coin-bags. Then my two captors jabbed their spears into my pony and into my back and called, 'Run,' and away we all tore for the heavy timber.

"The three of us got away and rode all night. The two men who carried the bags I never saw again. Who the third man was,

I don't know, but an Indian known as Spotted Crow joined us a day before we reached the Pawnee camp on the Republican River and had a long talk with my captors. I was lying bound at the foot of a tree too far away from them to hear what they said.

"That's all I can tell you. How I broke away a month later I have already told you.

"There can't have been more than seven or eight in the whole party. How many the Comanches killed, and what became of the mules and the wagon I don't know."

The three men now went and carefully searched the woods, where Benson and his captors had crossed the creek. They walked up and down the stream which was very low, but they found no traces of dead Indians and not a sign of coin-bags.

"Here is my theory," Benson began when they had dismounted to rest a while. "The two fellows who had the coin realized they could not escape with the bags and they cached them somewhere in the timber. But this delayed them long enough so that the

Comanches overtook them and killed them. The Comanches did not find the coin, but they took the mules, our wagon, guns, and everything else. They also killed the Pawnees who had captured Fridley.

"Spotted Crow was the third Indian with the coin-bags. He got away, but he returned and buried the bodies of the two dead Pawnees. The man whom Fridley shot was a white man, who had planned the robbery. He was carried off and killed by the Comanches, or if he escaped, he left the country and is keeping mum about his bloody work. If one could search the valley, he would probably find our wagon on a sand-bar of the Arkansas. And the mules, I would not be surprised to find in a corral at Independence."

Harley could suggest no other solution of the mystery, but he also expressed his belief that a white man had planned the robbery; but he did not think that Benson had much of a chance to recover the bags.

"You might as well hunt for a carpet-tack

on the prairie as search for your bags in this timber along Pawnee Fork, and you are likely to have some more trouble with the Reds."

"Nothing would suit me better," declared Benson whose fighting blood was up. "Man, we have an armful of guns and pistols, and ammunition enough to fight the whole Pawnee tribe. Nothing would please me better than a chance to let the sun shine through a few of my Pawnee friends. That scar on my side still hurts, and I can still feel that infernal rawhide around my ankles.

"No, I'm not going home till I find that Pawnee cache. You send the letter I gave you to my wife and tell her that we are safe and well, and that no Indians can touch us.

"There are four of us, and we have a regular arsenal of guns. Why, man, I bought out Colonel Bent's stock of shooting-irons that were worth taking away. It will be a bad day for the Pawnees if any of them come this way."

The next morning Captain Harley's train

started east, but Benson and Burley and the two boys pitched their camp in a grove of hackberry trees on Pawnee Fork a mile west of the crossing of the Santa Fé Trail.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MYSTERY OF THE PAWNEE CACHE

WHAT kind of a camp to put up was a serious problem for the four men.

A tepee would be the quickest to build. They had brought enough skins for it, and the necessary poles could be cut in a few minutes; but it would afford no protection against an attack from Indians.

Benson suggested a sod-house, such as the Pawnees built in those days. It would be warm and comfortable, but the building of it would involve a great deal of work; moreover, an Indian could crawl up on the roof of such a house and fire his gun or shoot his arrow through the smoke-hole.

It was true, as Burley suggested, that they might not see an Indian till spring, but it was also true, as Benson pointed out, that

they might be attacked by one of those small roaming parties almost any day.

After talking the matter over and considering it from all angles, they decided to put up a tepee and build a palisade of posts around it.

The grove of hackberry trees, where they had camped the first night they found not suitable for a permanent camp. It was surrounded by too many trees and bushes that would afford hiding-places for lurking Indians, although it was well sheltered from cold winds and was close to water.

They finally selected a level open meadow far enough away from any timber and brush, so that the bullets and arrows of any attacking Indians could do no harm. In this spot they set up their skin tepee. Then they dug a trench enclosing a square of about twenty feet. In this trench they planted the palisade, making it about ten feet high and using logs from six to ten or twelve inches thick.

Burley and Benson were good axmen and they made the chips fly lively from tall

straight hackberries, cottonwoods, and other trees, while to Philip and Ted fell the duty of digging the trench about three feet deep. The ponies also came in for their share of the work. They proved very useful for dragging the logs to the fort, thus speeding up the work and relieving the men of much hard and tedious labor; for the logs had to be cut at some distance from the fort.

The men all entered upon the work in the spirit of a game, and they were surprised themselves when the whole fort, as the boys had at once called it, was completed in two days.

"If Colonel Bent could see us at work," Benson remarked, as they were setting the poles in the trench, "he would know what I wanted to do with all the lumbering and mining-tools."

Four small logs they had tied together to serve as a door; and at the four corners and in the four walls of the palisade they had cut portholes. These portholes were about seven feet above the ground, so that no

Indian, although he might have crawled up to the fort under cover of darkness, could poke his gun through the portholes and fire at the inmates from the outside. On the inside the men had built a running-board of two flattened logs about three feet above the ground. Thus they could conveniently look through the portholes and pour a raking fire all around their stronghold.

They had now built a comfortable and safe camp, where they might stay all winter and defy almost any number of savages. The stockade was large enough so that, in case of need, they could take their ponies into it.

"Well, boys," Benson remarked with a chuckle when all was finished, "this place isn't quite as strong as Colonel Bent's fort, but I think we could stand off quite a bunch of them."

"There is one thing more to be done," Burley suggested. "We ought to dig a well inside the fort. If a band of them should shut us in here for several days, it would be very disagreeable. If we had water inside we

could laugh at them and tell them to stick around as long as they liked."

The plan seemed a good one, and they spent half a day in digging a well in the corner opposite the tepee. They found water at a depth of only five or six feet; and to prevent the sand from coming in, they lined the well with dry poles from which the bark had been carefully removed. They avoided green poles because their sap would have given a bad taste to the water.

A safe camp having been established, the search for the cache began in earnest. Both Benson and Burley were experienced plainsmen and had a good deal of knowledge of Indian ways, and they tried to reason out some clew as to the place where the Pawnees had most likely cached the silver.

The Pawnees were hard pressed by the Comanches, and there was certainly no time to bury the coin-bags.

They did not just drop the money; for if they had done that, they could have made their escape. They hid the silver somewhere

which delayed them long enough so their pursuers overtook them and killed them. Spotted Crow who did not carry a bag did make his escape.

After trying their best to get some clew, the men made a thorough search in Pawnee Fork. While one man guarded the ponies, the other three, with sharp poles probed every likely place in the creek. In every deep hole, under every overhanging bank, under piles of driftwood and in sand-banks they did not miss a square foot. For a mile above and below the place where Benson had crossed with his captors, they searched the bed and the bank of the stream, until Burley declared: "If anybody ever lost a rat-trap on this whole blooming stretch of creek, we would have found it. I would swear in court that there is no silver cached in these waters."

Benson had felt so sure that they would find the treasure in the creek that he was completely mystified, when it became certain that they had been following a wrong plan.

But the four treasure-hunters were not discouraged. They were sure that neither the Comanches nor the escaping Pawnees had carried away the treasure, consequently it must be cached somewhere within a mile of Benson's crossing place.

When they had given up finding it in the creek, they looked in every dense clump of brush and in every hollow tree with a cavity large enough and close enough to the ground so that a heavy bag might quickly have been thrust into it.

They did find some remains of the killed Pawnees, but not a sign did they discover of the bags, not a single coin did they rake up under the dead forest leaves. After two weeks of the most painstaking search they were completely baffled.

"Boys, we are beaten at the game," Benson acknowledged one evening as they were sitting around the fire in the tepee. "I don't know what to do next or where to look next. I don't know but that we had better pack up and go home."

But Burley and the boys would not hear of giving up.

"We had better do some hunting," Burley proposed, "or I won't be cook much longer. An elk and a few deer would keep us going for a while, and possibly while we are hunting deer we might stumble on that Pawnee cache."

They followed Burley's advice, and spent a week in hunting and scouting all along Pawnee Fork from its mouth at the Arkansas as far as ten or twelve miles west. They secured plenty of game, elk, deer, and wild turkeys. Grouse and quail they could have secured in any quantity if this game had not been too small for their expensive ammunition; for powder at Bent's Fort cost fifty cents a pint cup.

Generally they traveled all four together on horseback, but often they dismounted, and while two men stayed with the horses, the other two crossed back and forth over the valley of the creek like timber cruisers who had instructions to make a complete census

of every tree. They found stone arrowheads, stone axes, clubs and knives, Indian graves and battle-fields, for in this very region war-parties of many tribes had met in bloody combat for ages.

November had passed and December opened with cold north winds and light snow flurries. For a few days the white crystals made of woods and prairie a slate on which were minutely recorded all the doings of the wild folk, from elk, deer, and wolf to quail, weasel, and wild mice.

But the mystery they were trying to solve was growing deeper. They felt that they knew every square rod of the valley of Pawnee Creek for five miles above the crossing of the Santa Fé Trail, and yet of the stolen treasure they had found neither trace nor clue.

"Benson," declared Burley one evening, "I believe you made up this story of the Silver Cache. You have lived among liars so long that your morals have become corrupted. I don't believe you had a dollar in

your wagon. You blew it all in at the fandangoes in Santa Fé."

"Well, Jim," replied Benson with a smile. "It is true I have knocked about with you and the likes of you for a number of years, and if I hadn't lifted those bags into the wagon with my own hands, you could almost make me believe that I had had a romantic pipe-dream.

"It beats me what has become of those bags. Maybe the Comanches got hold of them, anyhow, and buried them among the sand-hills of the Arkansas. In that case, they are gone; lost for good."

"The Comanches did not get them, or the boys and I would have seen some gold and silver coins in the Comanche camp. The Pawnees did not get them, or you would have seen indications of it amongst the Pawnees," Burley came back at once.

"So where are they? They are here, somewhere on Pawnee Fork, because they cannot be anywhere else. Hang it, Benson, I believe you hid them yourself and now you

have forgotten the spot where you salted them down."

Again Benson smiled with a far-away look.

"Jim, I wish I had had a chance to salt them down, but those Reds had too much the drop on me."

There was one other thing that puzzled Benson and Burley, and that was the entire absence of Indians from the region. No Indians or signs of Indians had been seen on Pawnee Fork since the four whites had put up their tepee stockade.

A novice on the plains would probably have laughed at the men's caution and careful preparation, but Benson and Burley knew only too well that the time to prepare against Indians is when there are no signs of Indians. They also knew that by this time the Indians had gathered in their customary winter quarters. The Arapahoes, Kiowas, and Cheyennes at Big Timber on the upper Arkansas near Bent's Fort, where wood for their fires and cottonwood brush and bark for their

ponies was plentiful; the Pawnees in their pole-and-sod houses on the Republican River, north of the Arkansas; and the Comanches on the Canadian and in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

But what had become of the frequent small war parties? The weather had not been severe, and game was plentiful on Pawnee Fork, on Walnut Creek, and on the Arkansas.

Every day the men roamed about scouting for Indian signs and picking up such game as they came across. It was on one of these hunting and scouting trips west of their camp that quite by accident, as Burley had predicted, they almost stumbled upon a clew of the vanished treasure.

Philip had wounded a turkey, which flapped out of the tree-tops and hid in the tangled branches of a fallen elm. While the young hunter was looking for his game he discovered one of the coin-bags apparently thrown hurriedly under the prostrate branches and all but covered with dead leaves.

"Oh, Father and Burley," the boy called, "come quick! Here is one of the bags!"

It was indeed one of the bags, still bearing the names of Benson and Fridley, but the top had been cut off and every piece of silver was gone.

"Ah, I see," murmured Burley, "Indian took scalp and insides of bag. Indian had sharp scalping-knife and was in a heap big hurry. Let Indian keep scalp, but where's the insides?"

For a hundred feet around they searched for the "insides" on their hands and knees, raking over the dead leaves with their hands, but not a coin did they find.

However, their discovery put new spirit into them and made them feel that, at last, they were hot on the trail of their game.

"If we just stick around and don't give up, we'll find that cache yet," Burley insisted.

About a week later they were again looking for signs. It was a cool sunny morning, and during the night weeds and brush had

been covered with delicate crystals of hoar-frost. It was on the frosted grass and leaves that they discovered a track, not a deer-track or wolf-track, but moccasin tracks, tracks of real Indians. At last some Indians had come to the battle-haunted region.

"Look here, men," Benson pointed out, "It isn't *them*. There's only one. Don't get his track mixed with ours. Why is there only one? An Indian seldom goes alone far from the main camp."

The trail led past the fallen elm, but the maker of it had not stopped there. He had gone straight to a small level spot near the creek, where he had stirred the leaves with his feet and had poked in the ground with a stick. The trail and the signs were all fresh, perhaps an hour or two old. The Indian had come from the south side of the creek, and after examining the small level spot had leisurely crossed the creek and had slowly walked up the steep bluffs north of the creek.

The men hurried to their cabin and re-

turned with picks and spades, their miners' tools as Colonel Bent had called them.

"Here we do some digging," Benson told them; "but first let us clear away the dead leaves. I have a hunch, boys: That lone Indian was the honorable Spotted Crow, Pawnee medicine-man and cut-throat, and he was looking for the buried treasure. That's why he came all alone."

When the leaves were cleared away the men saw that the creek had flooded the piece of ground in spring and had covered it with a foot of mud. If the treasure was buried here, Spotted Crow had gone back to bring his squaw and daughters to dig it out with their hoes.

For half an hour the men picked and dug up the ground as if they were fishermen digging for angle-worms. The wilderness has no angle-worms, nor did it yield any silver, for not a coin did they find.

"Rest a minute!" Burley called. "Here, Benson, let us take a smoke and do a little

"Catch them! Catch them!" he cried as he threw a handful of silver into the air. *Page 285.*

thinking. I believe we are hot, but we are going it blind again.

"Those Pawnees did not scatter the silver on the ground, and they did not have time to dig a hole. The only way to hide it quickly was to shove it into a ready-made hole. The creek has covered and closed that hole and it's up to us to find it."

All four went to work probing and sounding with picks and poles for a covered hole.

"Here is one! Here it is!" exclaimed Ted as he ran his sharp stick into a buried woodchuck-hole under a stump.

With great care Philip dug away the loose soil and mulch. Now the entrance was clear. Philip lay down and reached in as far as he could. For a few seconds he felt around quietly, then he jumped up as if bitten by a rattlesnake.

"Catch them! Catch them!" he cried as he threw a handful of silver into the air. "The hole is full of them, chuck-full of them. It's all there!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOMEWARD BOUND

THEY had at last found the Cache of the Pawnee. The hole was as full of silver as a squirrel's hoard is of nuts or pine cones. And below the silver stuck the smaller bag intact, filled with gold coins. The second bag had been too large for the hole, so the Pawnee had skillfully "scalped" the bag, poured the contents into the hole, and thrown away the empty bag.

That evening there was a big feast in the stockade. The men and boys feasted on coffee and sugar, hardtack, elk-tongue, and choice venison.

In the morning the treasure was packed on Benson's and Burley's ponies, while the boys carried blankets and food. Each one had his gun and pistol loaded and carried his share of ammunition. The stockade, the tepee, and

the mining-tools they left behind, together with a handful of silver.

"The squaw and daughters of Spotted Crow should be rewarded for their long trip. If they found nothing at all, the old scoundrel would beat the poor girls." Burley remarked with a laugh: "There is more silver than they ever set eyes on."

The party did not expect to be pursued, but when night came Burley, Benson and Philip changed standing guard, and the ponies were staked out close to the sleeping men.

"They caught me napping once," Benson admitted, "but they will never catch me again."

On account of the heavy loads on the ponies, the travelers had to proceed slowly, for two ponies carried each about a hundred pounds of the Pawnee's cache.

It was now late in December and the weather turned bitterly cold. When they reached the camping-place at Walnut Creek, a violent storm with sleet and snow was

raging, while the temperature suddenly dropped many degrees.

It was still forenoon and the travelers had been on the way only a few hours. They could have gone on in the face of the storm, but they feared to exhaust or even lose their horses, and in that case one or more men would be compelled to travel on foot, so they decided to camp till the storm had passed.

They built a rude brush shelter for themselves and a similar shelter for the ponies. Under the lee of their own shelter they kept a fire going day and night. Of course, they slept Indian-fashion with their heads under cover, and during the first night, when the snow was coming down thick, Ted and Philip were so warm that Ted put his hand through the snow to let in some fresh air under their buffalo robe.

How the storm roared through the tree-tops, and how the branches cracked and groaned they scarcely heard; for they had become accustomed to sleep anywhere as long as they were warm.

The ponies also were very comfortable. They were sheltered from the cutting blast, the men had cut them a liberal supply of cottonwood browse, and they had not become heated by an attempt to travel against the storm.

The cold did not trouble them, for their hair had grown long and thick and they were used to living in the open the year round like the wild and half-wild ponies of Pawnees and Comanches. As long as they had plenty of grass or brush and water or snow, they did not suffer.

The only thing that made the men feel uneasy at their camp fire on the Walnut was the fact that straight north of them on the Republican River was located a big Pawnee village. If Spotted Crow came back after his cache, or if any Pawnees happened to return to their village, their trail would lead them close by the white men's camp. Although it was not likely that any Indians would be traveling, while the storm lasted, the white travelers kept one man on guard

duty during every hour of the night. They had learned the wisdom of watchfulness.

When on the third day the storm had spent itself, they broke camp at daylight and late in the evening reached Cow Creek, where they were less likely to fall in with any roaming Pawnees.

About midnight on Christmas Eve they reached Council Grove, which ended their journey through the country of savage and hostile Indians, but they did not relax their watchfulness, for white criminals had already begun to infest the east end of the Santa Fé Trail.

From now on both men and horses were anxious to travel as fast as possible over the last hundred and fifty miles of the trail, Ted's pony setting the pace and the other two following.

On New Year's Eve, before Mrs. Benson and Uncle Jethro blew out their candles, they reached the home farm.

The mother of the boys was speechless with

joy, while old Uncle Jethro fairly bubbled over with gladness and wonder.

No word had been received from the travelers since Captain Harley had brought the letter and news to them, and while the boys' mother had anxiously hoped and prayed for their return from week to week, Uncle Jethro had secretly made up his mind that all three of them were lost.

"I always said," he frequently mumbled to himself when he was doing chores about the barn, "that Silas would come to a bad end. Silas was always too much of a daredevil.

"Marian should not have let the boys go on the trail, but mothers no longer control their boys as they did when I was young."

Silas Benson and his boys compelled Jim Burley to accept a liberal share of the Pawnee Cache. Truthful Jim took it with a strong protest, saying: "A single man doesn't need a lot of money. I'm going back

on the trail to lift a few scalps of our Comanche and Pawnee friends.

"You stay at home, Silas, and use your dough for your family; a married man has no business on the trail."

When spring came, however, Benson as well as Burley was much tempted to join one of the long trains; but by the earnest entreaties of Mrs. Benson and the advice of Uncle Jethro, they were enabled to resist all temptations and all offers.

"You should never tempt the devil more than once," Uncle Jethro preached in a high voice and with slyly winking eyes: "for he gets you sure the second time."

When about a dozen years later, the war with Mexico broke out, Philip and Burley joined General Kearney's troops, and at the close of the war remained on the Pacific Coast.

Ted followed his youthful ambition and became a Santa Fé trader, until the railroad replaced the old wagon trail.

Early in the seventies, Ted with a long caravan of wagons camped for the last time on Pawnee Fork. The railroad had reached the famous creek. Long construction trains loaded with ties and rails were creeping westward like gigantic snakes. Crews of white men strung out the clanging rails, and men with long steel hammers spiked them to the ties, and the clank, clank, of the iron trail, the trail of a new era, was heard for the first time on Pawnee Fork and the Upper Arkansas. Among the sand-hills, south of the river, buffaloes and Texas cattle were grazing together. A herd of antelopes were watching the caravan from the Arkansas bottom. The prairie was dotted with sod-houses and cabins of white settlers, and under the trees on Pawnee Fork, stood the tepees of some Indians on their way to their reservations in Indian Territory.

The Red Man was leaving the great stage of the Plains and the White Man was taking the Indian's place.

Much had happened since the four adventurers recovered the Silver Cache of the Pawnee.

The Mexican War and the long bitter struggle of the Civil War were matters of history. The railroad and telegraph had come. The Indians of the Plains had begun to feel the strong arm of the United States Government, but they were not really subdued until the buffaloes became extinct in the early eighties, when the once proud and warlike tribes had no choice left them but submission to the white race, or starvation.

It was Ted's last trip over the long trail. In 1880 the railroad reached Santa Fé, and the trail and the long trains of canvas-covered wagons drawn by big long-horned oxen passed into the world of history and romance.

Years before this event, Kansas City at the mouth of the Kaw or Kansas River had wrested the Santa Fé trade from Independence, while Fort Leavenworth had become the headquarters for the United States military operations against the Indians.

Where years ago the ox-trains needed three months to creep over the prairie trail from the Missouri River to Santa Fé, the rumbling cars and shrieking engines of the steel trail cover the distance in thirty-six hours, running in many places over the very ground and fords of the old ox trail.

In a few spots the deep ruts of the ox wagons are still visible among the tall wild sunflowers, but most of the old trail has been leveled and buried by the white man's plow.

The white man's plow, his highways and railroads, have leveled the old Santa Fé Trail, the Indian villages and the Indian graves.

Thousands of Indians are to-day citizens of the United States in the State of Oklahoma, and some of them have crossed the ocean to fight side by side in the trenches of Europe with the descendants of the old traders and trappers and the Indian fighters of the old United States Army.

A new age has come. Gone are the buffalo herds, the war chiefs, and the Santa Fé

traders, never to return to earth. But in history and romance the buffaloes and the red warriors and the men of the Santa Fé trail will live forever.

THE END

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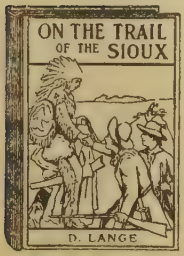

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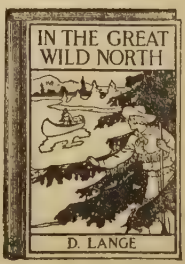

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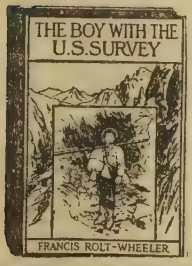

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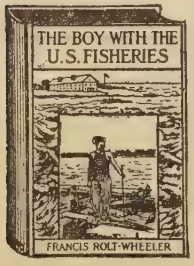

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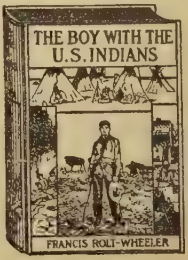

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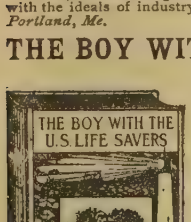

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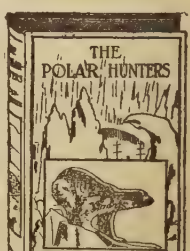

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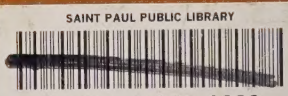

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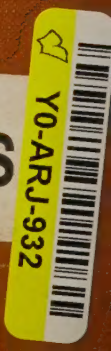

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